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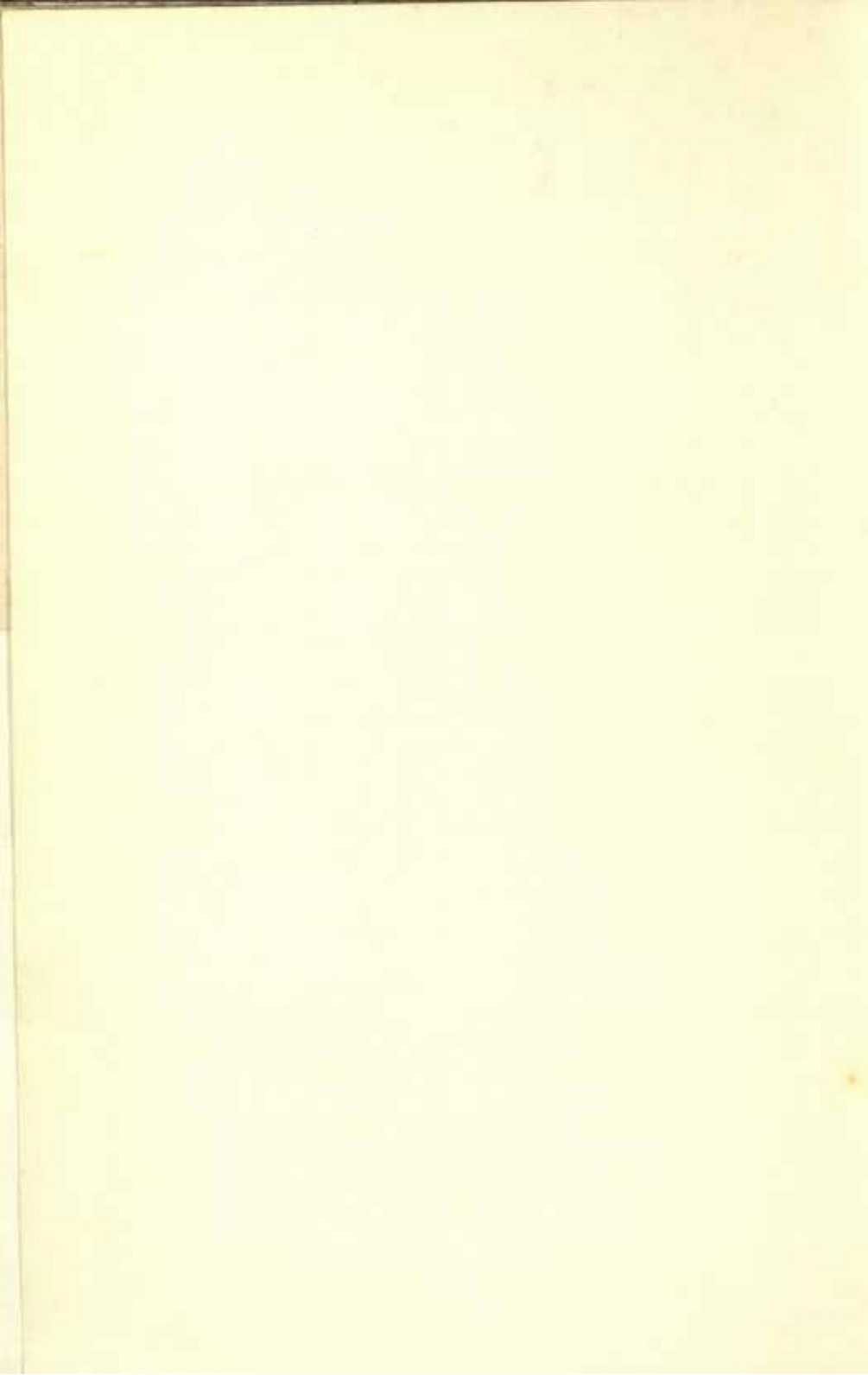
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BETWEEN OXUS AND JUMNA



1. MAZAR-I-SHARIF; THE BLUE MOSQUE

# Between Oxus and Jumna

*by*  
ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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## PREFACE

THIS BOOK gives some impressions of travels in the region between the River Oxus and the River Jumna. On this journey these two rivers were my limit. Though I saw them both, I did not cross either of them, but I kept on crossing and re-crossing the Indus in between them. The names of these famous rivers put my journey on the map, so I have taken them for my title.

The Indus and the Jumna both flow through the same enormous plain. There is nothing in the lie of the land to tell you when you are crossing their watershed. But you could not be unaware of the watershed between the Indus and the Oxus. It is a mountain-range whose crest is under snow during the greater part of the year. Running from south-west to north-east, this range keeps on gaining height. It starts as the Hindu Kush; it culminates in the Pamirs.

The passes over the Hindu Kush are few. Only two of them are traversable on wheels. On the 6th May, 1960, the lower of these two, the Sabzak Pass, was barely negotiable, even by land-rovers. From the dawn of history till within living memory, the passage had to be made on foot by the ordinary run of travellers. To make it on donkey-back (weather permitting) was travel de luxe; and, for men's and donkeys' feet alike, all the passes were impassable during four or five months out of the year. The passage over the Hindu Kush may sound forbidding, and so indeed it was and is. The present name of the range is said to mean 'Hindu-Killer'. An older name, transliterated in Greek as 'Paropanisos', is said to mean 'Higher than the ceiling of an eagle's flight'. This mountain-wall has proved, I am told, an insurmountable barrier for trout. They inhabit the streams that flow down from the range's north-western face; they have never succeeded in colonizing the streams on its south-eastern slope. But, where fish are baffled, men can find a way, and men have been busily traversing the Hindu Kush since the earliest times to which our records go back. They have been crossing

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those arduous passes on every kind of errand: as migrants, as refugees, as invaders, as merchants, as missionaries, as pilgrims.

Human beings have made the rough passage of the Hindu Kush a beaten track, because this mountain-range stands between two worlds that will not submit to being insulated from each other. It stands between 'the Sub-continent' and the main mass of Eurasia; and, ever since mankind first spread over the face of the Earth, the peoples of these two great regions have insisted on communicating with each other, notwithstanding the rigours of the passage across the intervening barrier. At this day, thousands of nomads make the passage twice a year, with their children, lambs, kids, sheep, goats, fowls, donkeys, and camels. And the Hindu Kush has seldom served as a political frontier. Today it is bestridden by the Kingdom of Afghanistan. In the early centuries of the Christian Era it was bestridden by the Kushan Empire. This empire extended from the Oxus to the Jumna, and in the whole of my journey I was never outside its bounds. The Kushan Empire was one of four powers that divided the civilized world between them. On land it marched with Parthia and with China, and it traded with the Roman Empire across the Arabian Sea.

The region between Oxus and Jumna has been the theatre of decisive events in mankind's history. It is perpetually demanding the historian's attention. For years it had been a lode-stone to me. In 1957 I had been tantalized by a glimpse of the fringe of it. In 1960 I found an opportunity of visiting it more at leisure. Hence this journey and this book.

A. J. T.



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## THANKS

I COULD not have gained what I have from this journey without the disinterested help, hospitality, and kindness that I was receiving day by day from beginning to end of it. The friendships that I made have been, for me, the greatest gain of all.

I had the honour of delivering the Maulana Azad Lectures for the year 1960 at New Delhi, and of spending a month as a visiting professor at the University of Peshawar. I was a guest of the Government of Pakistan on my journey through the tribal areas, and a guest of the Government of Afghanistan on my journey in that country. His Majesty the King of Afghanistan graciously received me at Surkh Kotal.

My hosts and travelling-companions are too numerous for it to be possible for me to thank each of them individually, so I must give my thanks collectively to most of my friends in the public services of India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, on the staff of the British Council in the two first-mentioned of these three countries, and in the British Embassy at Kabul. There are, however, some names that I cannot forbear to mention, though it is rather arbitrary to single out any when my gratitude to all is as great as it is.

On my journey round Afghanistan, I had the good fortune to be one of a party of seven travellers in two land-rovers. We were two Englishmen, one Afghan, and four Pakistanis. My fellow countryman was H.B.M. Ambassador in Afghanistan, Mr. Michael Gillett. It was thanks to him entirely that I was able to make this fascinating journey in his company. I also owe to him the illustrations. These tell, at a glance, what no words can describe adequately. They are here, thanks to the Ambassador's skill in taking the photographs, and his generosity in allowing me to reproduce them. Our Afghan maimandar was Mr. 'Abdarrahman of the Habibiah School, Kabul. The Pakistani members of the party were Mutabbar Khan, Zargul, and the two drivers, Sher Jan and 'Aziz: 'Cœur de Lion' and 'Stalwart' (they lived up to their names). Twenty-three days on the road together in flood-time forged a lasting bond of intimacy and affection between the seven of us.

On my journey through the tribal areas in Pakistan I had the good fortune to be travelling with my old friend Mr Enver Kureishi of the Ministry of Information. This journey was initiated and arranged by Mr Kureishi and his colleague Mr Qayyum, and Mr Kureishi also nobly endured the rigours of

travelling at many different altitudes and temperatures. But for him, this journey could never have been made. Without his company, it would not have been the immensely enjoyable experience that it was for me.

At Peshawar I met with unceasing kindness and hospitality both at the University and in the City. The friends that I have made there, as a result, include the Vice-Chancellor, Colonel Afridi; the Registrar, Mr Hashim; the head of the History Department, Professor Munawwar Khan; the Director of the Pash-tun Academy, Maulana 'Abd-al-Qadir; the Commissioner, Agha Abdul Hamid; the Deputy Commissioner, Ruedad Khan; the G.O.C., Major-General 'Atiq 'Abdurrahman.

I cannot leave unmentioned my host at Multan, Sayyid Inayat-'Ali Gardezi; the President of the University of Kabul, Dr Ashghar; Professor Kohzad; the Director of the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan, Professor Daniel Schlumberger of the University of Strasbourg; Sri Humayun Kabir, under whose auspices I gave the Maulana Azad Lectures at New Delhi; and Dr Appadorai, the Director of the Indian Institute of World Affairs, who, once again, gave me the opportunity of meeting a number of distinguished Indian scholars.

There are more names on the tip of my pen, but I must not allow this note of thanks to grow to an extravagant length. So I will beg the forgiveness of my many other friends in these three countries whom I have left unnamed but not forgotten.

A. J. T



## I. The Old World's Eastern Roundabout

EUROPEANS have a saying that 'all roads lead to Rome'. From a European standpoint they may look as if they do. But Europe is one of the fringes of the Old World, and eccentric positions produce distorted views. Plant yourself, not in Europe, but in 'Iraq, which is the historic centre of our Oikoumenê. Seen from this central position, the road-map of the Old World will assume a very different pattern. It will become evident that half the roads of the Old World lead to Aleppo, and half to Begrâm. The second of these two names marks the site of the historic city of Kapisha-Kanish, at the southern foot of the Central Hindu Kush, where three roads meet after crossing the mountains.

Civilization in the Old World seems to have started in 'Iraq about 5000 years ago, and in the meantime it has spread from 'Iraq both eastwards and westwards. Eastwards it has spread to Persia, Afghanistan, the Indo-Pakistani Sub-continent, Central Asia, Eastern Asia. Westwards it has spread to Egypt, Anatolia, the Aegean, North-West Africa, Europe, Russia. This progressive spread of civilization from its birth-place in 'Iraq to the ends of the Earth has turned the Oikoumenê into a house of many mansions. Civilization has become plural instead of singular; and the civilized world has diversified itself into a festoon of regional civilizations, trailing from Japan at the north-eastern end to Ireland at the north-western end and dipping below the Equator in Java. The younger provinces of civilization, on either side of 'Iraq, do not all stand in the same relation to each other or to the Oikoumenê as a whole. The differences between their geographical situations sort them out into two classes. Some



of them are 'culs-de-sac' and some of them are 'roundabouts'. The culs-de-sac are regions on the fringe of the Oikoumenê that have received successive influences from the centre but have not been able to pass these influences on to regions farther afield. The roundabouts are regions on which routes converge from all quarters of the compass and from which routes radiate out to all quarters of the compass again.

Classical examples of culs-de-sac are Japan at the north-eastern corner of the Oikoumenê, Java at its southernmost bulge, and Morocco, the British Isles, and Scandinavia at its north-western corner. Classical examples of roundabouts are two regions flanking 'Iraq on either side. Syria (in the broadest geographical meaning of the name) is the roundabout to the west of 'Iraq, and North-Eastern Iran (the present-day Afghanistan) is the one to the east of her. Syria has been the link between South-West Asia, Africa, Anatolia, and Europe. Afghanistan has been the link between South-West Asia, the Indo-Pakistani Sub-continent, Central Asia, and Eastern Asia.

The vicissitudes of history can turn a cul-de-sac into a roundabout and a roundabout into a cul-de-sac. Western Europe was a cul-de-sac for about 1700 years, dating from its incorporation in the Oikoumenê in the third century B.C. During those seventeen centuries the Atlantic was a barrier to any farther westward expansion of the civilization of the Old World. But the Spanish-born Roman poet Seneca had prophesied that, one day, this barrier would give way to human enterprise, and, after 1,400 years, this prophecy came true. In the fifteenth century the Portuguese invented a new kind of sailing-ship that could keep the sea continuously for months on end. This invention suddenly gave the West European peoples the command of the oceans, and that achievement temporarily turned Western Europe into the World's central roundabout from which all sea-routes radiated and on which all sea-routes converged. This revolutionary change in the nature of the key-instruments of communication temporarily put both Afghanistan and Syria out

of business; for the traffic that had made the fortunes of these two historic roundabouts had been mainly overland traffic on the backs of domesticated animals. The carriers had been donkeys, horses, and camels. Technology, however, is always reluctant to stand still. In our day we have been seeing a further series of technological inventions: mechanized rail and road vehicles, followed up by aircraft. These latest inventions have been deposing Western Europe from her temporary ascendancy in the World and have been reinstating Syria and Afghanistan.

Both these historic roundabouts would have recaptured their traditional role as focuses of communication still faster than they are doing if their economic recovery were not being handicapped by disputes over political frontiers. These can be as formidable obstacles as any physical barrier. All the same, Beirut is already one of the World's most important international airports, and Qandahar is making a bid to become another of them. As for mechanized transport on the ground, the new roads that are being built for Afghanistan by Russian and American civil engineers promise to turn her, once again, into the international thoroughfare that she used to be in the Donkey-and-Camel Age.

The Russians are building a new road from Qandahar northward to Kushka, the southernmost rail-head of the railway-network of Soviet Central Asia. The Americans are building a new road from Qandahar south-eastward to Chaman, the terminus of the road and railway in Pakistan that run north-westward from Quetta to the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier. The Russians are building another new road from Kabul northward to Qyzyl Qala, a river-port that they have already built for Afghanistan on the Afghan bank of the River Oxus. This road will be carried through the Central Hindu Kush by a tunnel under the Salang Pass. This is the most direct, but also the highest, of three passes—Salang, Shibar, and Khawak—that cross this section of the Hindu Kush and link the Indo-Pakistani Sub-continent with Central Asia. The Americans are building another new road from Kabul eastward to Torkham, the western terminus of



the road and railway in Pakistan that clamber over the hump of the Khyber Pass.

These new roads promise to reinstate Afghanistan in her traditional position in the World. They are her economic bonus from the present political competition between the Soviet Union and the United States. The bonus is valuable, but the accompanying risk is high. Roundabouts are strategic as well as economic assets, and strategic assets are tempting political prizes.

It will be obvious that Afghanistan is intensely interesting today for a student of contemporary international affairs. It is of equal interest for a student of the history of civilization in the Old World during these last five thousand years. As he follows the main threads of history—economic, political, demographic, artistic, religious—he finds his attention being drawn again and again to the Old World's eastern roundabout, as well as to its western one. Afghanistan has been a highway for migrating peoples and for expanding civilizations and religions, and it has been a key-point in the structure of empires. The examples of Afghanistan's role as a roundabout in each of these aspects are so numerous that an exhaustive catalogue would fill a volume and would quite overload a chapter. A few illustrations will be enough to make the point.

A long procession of nomadic or ex-nomadic migrant peoples have passed through Afghanistan from Central Asia en route for the Indo-Pakistani Sub-continent. The Aryas, who passed through at some date during the second half of the second millennium B.C., brought the Sanskrit language to India. They were the fathers of the Hindu civilization that supplanted the pre-Aryan culture which is represented in the Indus valley by the sites at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. A swarm of Iranian-speaking nomadic invaders who occupied the Helmand River basin and the Panjab in the seventh century B.C. deserves mention because one of the participating tribes bore the name Pactyes according to the Ancient Greek historian Herodotus. Is the name that has come down to us in this Ancient Greek version identical with

the present-day name Pakhtuns (alias Pathans)? If it is, we have here a clue to the date at which the ancestors of the present-day Pathans first established themselves in the Helmand basin.

A second swarm of Iranian-speaking nomads, the Sakas, invaded Afghanistan in the second century B.C. Some of these settled in the delta of the Helmand River, as is witnessed by the name Seistan which this country still bears to-day instead of its previous name Sarangia. Others pushed on far into the Sub-continent. Some of their blood, and still more of their spirit, may have been inherited from them by the present-day Marathas in the highland hinterland of Bombay. Another Central Asian nomadic people, the Yüechi, following close at the Sakas' heels, settled in the country between the Oxus and the Hindu Kush which had previously been known as Bactria and which is now included in the Kingdom of Afghanistan. In the first century of the Christian Era one of the Yüechi tribes, the Kushans, built up an empire that straddled the Hindu Kush and stretched from the south bank of the Oxus to the west bank of the Jumna. In the course of the last nineteen centuries the Kushan Empire has had more than one avatar. Approximately the same area was ruled in the eleventh century of the Christian Era by the Turkish empire-builder Mahmud of Ghazni, and again in the eighteenth century by the Afghan empire-builder Ahmad Shah Abdâli.

In the fifth century of the Christian Era one wing of the Huns invaded the Sub-continent across Afghanistan while Europe was being invaded by another wing of the same Central Asian nomadic people. The Huns were ferocious and destructive, but they were surpassed by the Mongols, who, in the thirteenth century, invaded Afghanistan as well as most of the rest of continental Eurasia. (On the mainland, only India and Western Europe escaped this calamity.) Finally, in the early years of the sixteenth century, a Turkish-speaking people from Western Siberia, the Uzbeks, occupied what is now Northern Afghanistan, as well as what is now the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan on the opposite side of the



Oxus River. The Uzbeks did not succeed in crossing the Hindu Kush, but, indirectly, the Uzbeks did, nevertheless, change the course of history in the Sub-continent. They changed it by propelling across the Hindu Kush the survivors of the Timurids, who had been the previous Turkish rulers of the Central Asian region that the Uzbeks conquered. These fugitive Timurids became the founders of the Mughal Empire in India.

The peoples of Afghanistan themselves were not always passive spectators of the migrations that passed through their country. They, too, took an active part in the game of invading India. The Ghoris, who supplanted the Turkish rulers of Ghazni in the twelfth century of the Christian Era, were natives of the central highlands of Afghanistan. They extended the area of Muslim rule in India from the Indus to the Ganges basin. The Ghoris' Turkish successors at Delhi were supplanted by the Afghan Lodis, before these, in their turn, were supplanted by the Mughals. The Mughal Emperor Babur's conquest of Hindustan was successfully challenged, after Babur's death, by a Bengali Muslim of Afghan descent, Sher Shah Sur. So long as Sher Shah lived, Babur's son Humayun remained an exile; and, though Sher Shah's reign over Hindustan was brief, he found time to organize a system of imperial communications and land-taxation. This system was so good that it was taken over by the Mughals after their return, and then by the Mughals' successors the British. In the interval of anarchy in Hindustan, when the Mughal regime was already declining and the British regime had not yet taken its place, another swarm of Afghan invaders, the Rohillas, established themselves in a choice piece of territory that is now included in Uttar Pradesh (formerly the United Provinces and still the U.P.).

Migrations of peoples, such as those that have just been passed in review, can change the course of history, but still greater effects can be produced by the spread of civilizations and religions, and the history of Afghanistan bears witness also to this.

The Achaemenid Persian Empire, which expanded across

Afghanistan into the Indus valley in and after the sixth century B.C., brought with it, as one of its official languages, Aramaic written in an alphabet derived from the Phoenician. The use of the Aramaic language as an international medium of communication did not long survive the overthrow of the First Persian Empire by Alexander the Great—though a bilingual inscription in Aramaic and Greek, set up by the Indian Emperor Ashoka in the third century B.C., has recently been discovered at Qandahar. On the other hand the Aramaic alphabet made conquests after the fall of the Persian Empire that put even Chingis Khan's conquests in the shade. It is not surprising that in Western Iran this alphabet should have been used for writing a local Iranian language: Pahlavi. It is more remarkable that from Afghanistan the use of the Aramaic alphabet should have spread south-eastwards into the Sub-continent and north-eastwards across the whole breadth of Asia. On the north-western border of the Sub-continent the Aramaic alphabet became the parent of the Kharoshthi, which was used for writing some of the Indian dialects stemming from Sanskrit. Travelling north-eastward across the Oxus, the Aramaic alphabet was used successively for writing a Central Asian Iranian language, Soghdian, a Central Asian Turkish language, Uighur, and eventually also Mongol and Manchu. Visit the Temple of Heaven at Peking, which was built in the Manchu imperial dynasty's time, and look at the trilingual inscriptions on it. The Chinese version is, of course, written in Chinese characters, but the Manchu and Mongol versions are written in the Aramaic alphabet.

After the overthrow of the First Persian Empire by Alexander, the Greek invaders felt themselves at home again when they reached the vine-clad country of the Paropanisadae, at the southern approach to the passes leading northwards over the Central Hindu Kush; and in Bactria, north of the passes and between the Hindu Kush and the Oxus, they planted their civilization so successfully that its influence lasted here for centuries.

About the year 183 B.C. a Greek king of Bactria, Demetrius, seized an opportunity that was offered him in India by



the fall there of the Maurya dynasty's empire. Demetrius crossed the Hindu Kush and conquered what are now Southern Afghanistan and the Panjab. After that, Greek rule lasted for half a century more in Bactria and for two centuries south of the Hindu Kush. The chief surviving witnesses to it are the Greek princes' splendid coins. But in this region Greek civilization outlasted Greek rule; for the Greeks' successors the Kushans, whose empire was larger and longer-lived than the Bactrian Greek empire had been, were—as they claimed to be—Philhellenes. Though they adopted the local Iranian language of Bactria, instead of Greek, to serve as the official language of their empire, the Kushans wrote their Bactrian in the Greek alphabet. This has been proved by the discovery of a Bactrian inscription, in Greek letters, at the Kushan Emperor Kanishka's fire-temple at Surkh Kotal, on the road to Balkh from the passes over the Central Hindu Kush. And there is, of course, a powerful Greek ingredient in the visual art of the so-called Gandhara School, which flourished, in the age of the Kushan Empire, in and around the empire's capital cities: Begram, Peshawar, Taxila.

Greek artistic influences may have played upon Kushan Gandhara from two directions: over the Hindu Kush from Bactria and over the Indian Ocean from Alexandria in Egypt. By the time when the Kushan Empire was established in the first century of the Christian Era, Greek seamen, plying in the Indian Ocean from ports on Egypt's Red-Sea coast, had discovered how to make use of the monsoons for sailing direct across the Indian Ocean to the delta of the Indus, instead of hugging the coasts of Arabia and Baluchistan. This notable shortening of the length of the voyage gave a stimulus to trade between the valleys of the Indus and the Nile; and so, in Kushan Gandhara, the Greek influence from Bactria over the Hindu Kush may have been reinforced by a Greek influence from Alexandria via the Indus valley.

History repeated itself in the Old World's eastern roundabout after the overthrow of the Sasanid Persian Empire by



the Muslim Arabs in the seventh century of the Christian Era. Like the Greeks nearly a thousand years earlier, the Arabs planted themselves firmly in the country between the Oxus and the Hindu Kush that had once been known as Bactria; and, like their Greek predecessors again, the Muslims eventually forced their way over the Central Hindu Kush and invaded the Sub-continent. Afghanistan was the thoroughfare along which Islam, like Hellenism before it, made its way into India.

All the movements of peoples, empires, civilizations, and religions that have been mentioned in this chapter up to this point were movements across Afghanistan into the Sub-continent from regions outside India. But there have also been movements across Afghanistan from India into other parts of the World; and one of these—the propagation of Buddhism into Eastern Asia—is an outstanding event in mankind's history up to date.

When the First Persian Empire's carcass was divided up, after Alexander's death, among a number of rival competitors for the prize, one of these was an Indian empire-builder, Chandragupta Maurya. Chandragupta began by annexing Alexander's ephemeral conquests in the Indus valley and uniting them with the ancient Kingdom of Magadha in the Ganges basin. He then went on to extend his empire still farther westward by doing a deal with the Macedonian war-lord Seleucus 'the Victor'. Chandragupta gave Seleucus 500 Indian war-elephants for use against Seleucus's most formidable Macedonian rival, Antigonus 'One-Eye'. In exchange, Seleucus ceded to Chandragupta a large zone of former Persian territory west of the Indus and south of the Hindu Kush. The recently discovered bilingual inscription set up by Chandragupta's grandson, Ashoka, at Qandahar shows that Qandahar must have lain on the Mauryan side of the new frontier between the Mauryan and the Seleucid dominions.

Chandragupta Maurya's success in extending his empire westward was merely an achievement on the political surface of life; and, on this superficial plane, it was more than

undone when, some hundred and fifty years later, the Maurya Empire fell to pieces and the Bactrian Greeks pushed their way farther into India than Alexander's limit. But the spread of Indian influence beyond the bounds of the Sub-continent took a more significant and enduring form when Chandragupta's grandson, the Emperor Ashoka, became a convert to Buddhism. We know, from one of Ashoka's own inscriptions, that he sent missionaries to preach Buddhism in the realms of the contemporary rulers of the Persian Empire's Greek successor-states. We do not know what results, if any, were produced by this Buddhist missionary enterprise in the Hellenic World; but it is certain that, in India itself, Ashoka's conversion placed Buddhism in a strong position for the next six hundred years at least. It was strong enough to influence successive waves of invaders from beyond the Hindu Kush after the Maurya Empire's fall. Menander, one of the most important of the Bactrian Greek rulers in India in the second century B.C., figures in the Buddhist scriptures as a participant in a dialogue called *The Questions of Milinda*; and, round about the turn of the first and second centuries of the Christian Era, the greatest of the Kushan emperors, Kanishka, became a patron of Buddhism, if not an outright convert to it.

The Kushan Empire was the thoroughfare along which Buddhism made its way from India, through what are now Soviet Central Asia and Sinkiang, to the north-west corner of China. From there it spread to the whole of the rest of China and on into Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Afghanistan's role as a roundabout has never been played to greater effect.

This route from India to China via Afghanistan, which is the route by which Buddhism actually travelled, looks strangely circuitous on the map. Why travel round three sides of Tibet? Why not short-circuit this rambling route by travelling straight from Bengal to Yunnan? The answer is, of course, that South-East Asia—where India and China have so sensitive and sore a common frontier today—was still outside the pale of civilization when Buddhism was on the



march. In Kanishka's day, Indian culture was only just acquiring its first footholds in what are now Cambodia and Annam; and it was not till the close of the thirteenth century of the Christian Era that Yunnan was redeemed from barbarism and incorporated in China by China's Mongol conquerors. The route through Afghanistan, circuitous though this was, was the earliest route along which India and China made contact with each other. This was the route followed in the transmission of Buddhism; and that is the most important transaction that has ever taken place between India and China so far.

These illustrations of Afghanistan's role as a roundabout are just a few excerpts from a voluminous story. But perhaps they will have served to make the point that, for a student of human affairs—past, present, or future—some study of Afghanistan is indispensable. In studying any country it is also indispensable that one should see that country at first hand. And how long a time does one need to spend on this? Ideally, a whole working life-time would not be long enough. So what can one hope to do in four months and ten days that are to be distributed between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India? Well, my hopes are high; for I know, from past experience, that a firsthand glimpse can sometimes speak volumes. Four months and ten days! Surely that should be time enough for taking on board a whole cargo of new knowledge. Still, it is going to be a race with time; and, if I am to win it, I must run it, not as a jog-trot Marathon, but as an all-out hundred yards. Now for it. The pistol is fired. I am off.

## 2. To New Delhi by Jet

'AND the evening and the morning are the first day'—or was it the second? Certainly I left the ground in England on Friday the 19th February at 9.30 a.m., and landed at 11.00 p.m., English time, at New Delhi. And this would have been

all in one day, if, in New Delhi, today had not already been tomorrow. My London 11.00 p.m. was New Delhi's 5.00 a.m. next day. The philosophical problem defeats me: I can only report the facts.

By lunch-time in the comet we were over the Ionian Sea, between Italy and Greece. Pydna? In 168 B.C. it took a fortnight for the news of the victory to reach Rome; and now here I am over Pydna an hour and twenty minutes after taking off at Rome. By five minutes past three I was looking at Asia from Istanbul airport, and the Sun was setting behind us below Thrace. At 5.00 p.m., somewhere over the Upper Euphrates or thereabouts, Istanbul airport re-contacted us with a radio message. The Queen had a son; they thought we would like to know. We did like to: everybody clapped, just as if we had been standing with our faces glued to the railings of Buckingham Palace. By 6.30 we were in Tehran; and, by the time we took off again from there, New Delhi was less than four hours' jet-flying-time away. By the end of dinner, we must have been somewhere over the middle of Afghanistan. Darkness had fallen on us ever so long ago—at the moment, in fact, at which we had left the Sea of Marmara and crossed the westernmost coast of Asia. But now the Moon was out, and I could just make out the landscape 37,000 feet below me. Those two wriggling river valleys: Could they be the Arghandab and the Helmand? If they were, I must be within a few miles of the minaret at Jam. In May it is going to take me eight or nine days to get to Jam and back from Herat, the nearest city. And here I am, being catapulted almost over Jam in my one day's journey to New Delhi from London. I closed my eyes, but the word of command to fasten seat-belts woke me up to the sight of the lights of New Delhi, twinkling below me as we slithered down towards what, for me, was journey's end (the untiring comet itself was bound for Tokyo).

'The craft of his engines surpasseth his dreams.' Sophocles wrote that before Man had invented even a windmill. But it was already true in Sophocles' day. Our latest piece of clockwork, which conveyed me from London to New Delhi in



13½ hours (including stops), is indeed an astonishing piece of craftsmanship. But I shall not be content till Man the craftsman has done something for me still cleverer than that. I am waiting for the invention that will take me from London to New Delhi, as the comet does, within the day, but will take me, not up aloft, but on the ground, below the cloud-screen. My inventor must make it possible for me to do it in one day on foot, seeing everything that I want to see on the way, and arriving as fresh as when I started. When he succeeds in doing that for me, I shall concede that Man is a really clever technician.

Flying comet-wise is no solution; for just think of all that I skimmed over, blindfold, on yesterday's (or was it already today's) flight. After finishing lunch, I thought to myself, with happy anticipation: in a moment I am going to see again Mounts Pelion and Ossa and Olympus, and then, in another moment, Mounts Athos and Rhodope. But, after my glimpse of a stretch of the coast of the Gulf of Taranto, I did not see one thing more before the misty approach to Istanbul airport. The whole of Greece was blotted out, and so were the whole of Anatolia, Iran, and Afghanistan, except for that patch of dimly moonlit landscape within an hour's flight of New Delhi. Lake Van and Lake Urmiah: What use is it to me to soar over them without catching a sight of them?

What did I actually see on this six-thousand-miles' comet's-progress that has thrown my time-keeping six hours out? I saw a strip of the Isle de France (a mosaic of minute snow-covered fields). I saw some Alps sticking up through the ubiquitous cloud-screen. I saw Cape Misenum and Lake Avernus as plain as on a relief map. But *facilis descensus*? Not a bit of it. There was no hope of getting down within even 10,000 feet of Avernus-level. And the clouds blotted out Naples, Vesuvius, Pompeii, and Sorrento as we swept on at our standard 520 miles an hour. So what had I seen, that day, in terms of things of really human interest? Probably I had seen less than had been seen by that man driving the bullock-cart that we are now passing on the road from New Delhi airport to the city. So, technicians, please get on with

your job. You are only just at the beginning of it. When you can make me see, from a comet, as much of the World as can be seen from a bullock-cart, I will give you nearly full marks. Till then, I have my reservations about Sophocles' laudation of Man the craftsman.

### 3. Multan

SOMETIMES fulfilment exceeds expectation. It is a rare experience and a rapturous one. This has happened to me in Multan.

I had my first sight of Multan yesterday, and I have been waiting and longing to see this city for the last twenty-five years—ever since I picked up a copy of Edwardes's fascinating book about the siege of Multan in 1848. Moolraj the Sikh governor of Multan; the Daoodpootras, Edwardes's Muslim allies; Edwardes's crossing of the Indus and extemporisation of an army; the changing fortunes of besiegers and besieged, and Moolraj's final fall and fate: all this was vividly present in my mind. It was, after all, an important chapter of history, since it was the overture to the second Anglo-Sikh war. So I was eager to see Multan with my own eyes; but in 1957 I had been disappointed. I had buzzed through Multan station in the very small hours, in the night-mail from Lahore, and had detrained, still in the rather small hours, far away to the south at Rohri. So the fascinating city had been, for me, blacked out. And now, at last, I am here. As we drove through the ramparts yesterday, I remembered an earlier besieger of Multan than Edwardes. If Multan is in truth the city of the Malli, this was where Alexander was wounded when he led the storming-party (his Macedonians took a savage revenge).

If Alexander assaulted not just the city but the fort, it is no wonder that he was flung back. Last night I was standing, at sunset, on the fort's crowning height, and was looking down precipitously at the city spread out below me and the



leafy plain beyond, with its mantle of dust (the dust is one of four blemishes that are rudely attributed to Multan by irreverent outsiders). Alexander and Edwardes and, in between, the early Muslim Arabs and the Turkish Muslim Mahmud of Ghazni: a long series of invaders has mastered Multan, in spite of the city's natural strength. Yet the history that hits you in the eye when you are on the spot is the history of religion, not of warfare. The buildings that dominate the fort are the tombs of the Saint Baha-al-Haqq and his grandfather. Baha-al-Haqq's tomb was built by Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq for himself; but, since the saint was the emperor's spiritual adviser and the saint died first, the emperor surrendered this tomb to him and built for himself the tomb at the third city of Delhi—Tughlaqabad—that I was visiting last Sunday.

I have paid my respects to Baha-al-Haqq, but the tomb under whose shadow I am now writing is not his. It is the tomb of Shah Yusef Gardezi. I am being entertained in the Gardezi family's diwan-khaneh, their family guest house, and the tomb, with the tombs of the saint's descendants clustering round it, is only a stone's-throw away. Being named Joseph, I (like Stalin) am this saint's namesake, but I cannot claim also to be 'Shah'; for, in Pakistan, 'Shah' signifies a Sayyid: that is to say, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

The legend declares that, nine hundred years ago, Shah Yusef Gardezi came riding into Multan on a lion, with a live snake for a whip and with a pair of pigeons fluttering over his head. He had ridden his lion all the way from Gardez in Afghanistan, and he had brought with him the teaching of the Twelve-Imam branch of the Shi'ah sect of Islam (the form of Shi'ism that, today, is the national religion of Persia). In the course of nine hundred years both the saint's descendants and the pigeons' descendants have multiplied exceedingly. This whole quarter of the city is now occupied by the houses of the Gardezis and the Gardezis' cousins' cousins. As for the pigeons, they live on the Gardezis' roofs and cluster, in force, on the Gardezis' saintly ancestor's tomb. The tomb is cased in blue tiles, dating from the reign of the Mughal



Emperor Humayun, and at intervals there are apertures in the tile-work, opening into cavities specially provided to give the pigeons a lodging as close as possible to the spot where the saint's body lies. It is a pretty sight to see them poking in and out, for all the world as if the tomb had been built solely for their benefit.

The pigeons flutter here below. The kites soar there, up aloft, at what looks almost like jet-plane altitude when one lifts up one's eyes towards the sky. Since this is the Indian Sub-continent, the kites do not make the pigeons their prey. They take their cue from the local human beings and leave the pigeons alone.

Nine hundred years of unbroken family history. What a sheet-anchor for the fortunate Gardezis in this swiftly changing world.

## 4. The Seven Climes

THE classical Arab geographers, following the Greeks, divide the face of the Earth into seven climes, ranging from torrid to arctic. I feel as if I had passed through all seven on my five-hundred-miles' journey from Multan to Peshawar. Today I am shivering in Peshawar in an English coat-and-waistcoat and woollen jumper too. It is pouring chilly rain, and many more sodden rain-clouds are drifting down on us from over the western mountains. A week ago today, on the road from Multan to Lahore, even a tropical coat was intolerable. I was sweltering in my shirt-sleeves, and choking in clouds of dust—dust so blinding that the car had to halt until it had slowly drifted away. The first and seventh climes are, indeed, worlds apart.

In this northern world round Peshawar, times are changing. Not so long ago the traveller through the Khyber Pass had to pay tribute to the Afridis, or it would be the worse for him. Passing emperors have defied the Afridis and have lived—or sometimes not lived—to regret it. Today one can travel

through the pass and back by the Afridi bus service, and the tribute has turned into a fare. On the way back by road from the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier at the western end of the pass, we happened to approach Landi Kotal railway-station at the moment when the weekly train was disgorging a horde of passengers. As they streamed westward, I thought they must be on pilgrimage, but their business was mundane. They were bound for Landi Kotal market-place, where Russian teapots, German wireless-sets, and Indian gauzes can be bought at prices which make the rail or bus fare from Peshawar worth paying. The Pakistan Government loses some customs revenue, but it turns a blind eye, and this is surely politic. The highland tribesmen cannot live off the crops from their pitiful little stony fields—at least, not unless they plant the fields illicitly with the opium poppy. Forbid poppy-cultivation, forbid the contraband trade, and you will drive a starving people into falling back on their traditional way of earning a living. And the old rhythm of raids alternating with punitive expeditions is not one that either party wishes to revive.

In old days a tribe used to measure its strength by the number of its rifles; today it measures it by the number of its buses and lorries, and, in this modern form of competition, the Afridis and the Shinwaris—both favoured by their position astride an historic thoroughfare—seem to be well ahead of their neighbours. The Yusefzais in the Swat valley, a ribbon of fertile soil, are making their profits by experimenting in valuable cash crops. The other day I met the man who planted the first orange trees in this lovely valley, and the first poplars too. His neighbours keep their eye on him, and, whatever he plants, they plant. They recognize that he has a magic touch which transmutes this good earth into gold. He has been at it now for forty years—voluntarily chained to the soil out of which he has conjured these profits; but, forty years ago, he saw the World.

Forty years ago, two Swati boys from Thana village became annoyed with their respective families and made a compact to run away to sea. Sea meant Bombay, and it is a



long, long way to Bombay from Swat. However did they get there? Where did they find the money? How did they fare with their Pakhtu speech? The story does not say. It tells us only that they were in such a hurry that they would not even wait for each other. When the second of the two reached Bombay, he found that his fellow-truant had sailed for Cardiff the day before. He followed him to Cardiff, only to find, there, that the other boy had just sailed for the United States. After that, the Government of the United Kingdom intervened. Officially or benevolently, it put the laggard Swati boy on board a cargo-boat, to be shipped back to Bombay at the British tax-payer's expense. But, when the fare had been paid and the involuntary passenger taken on board, the owners switched the ship's destination from Bombay to Yokohama, so the Swati passenger had an unexpected free voyage from Britain to Japan and back. At the U.K. Government's second attempt, the British tax-payer's money was expended more successfully. This time the Swati boy was duly landed at Bombay, and, from there, he made his way home to Swat and has spent the intervening forty years as the pioneer agriculturist whom I met at Thana last week. The other boy's career has been dramatically different; for, forty years ago, the United States Government was not so officious as it probably would be if a similar case arose today. The American immigration authorities took no notice of the new arrival, so he crossed the continent to California and made a fortune there. At this moment he is on the Atlantic, with an American super-automobile among his baggage. His plan is to drive from Cherbourg to Swat overland. If his back-axle holds out over the Hindu Kush he will be seeing his native valley and his fellow runaway for the first time in forty years. Parting at twenty and meeting again at sixty! What will the two men make of each other when the Swati Californian's elephantine car rolls into Thana next month?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately this adventurous plan was frustrated by politics. When I last heard of the super-automobile, it was ticking up formidable warehousing-charges in the docks at Karachi while its owner was still visa-less in California.

## 5. Hazâra

CADETS and officers who have taken a course at the Pakistan Military Academy at Kakûl must surely have received an unconscious education in the appreciation of beauty, as well as a deliberate one in the art of war. My own stay was for a bare three hours, yet, in that brief time, the beauty of the landscape made an imprint on my mind which will not fade. Whoever it was that chose this site for the Academy should be congratulated. It has been sited on the upper slopes of an amphitheatre surrounded by mountains that, on this sunny day, shone blue and purple. Here, just above Abbottabad, the mountains are high enough still to hold, in flecks, the remains of their original 'forest fleece'. Yet they are mere foothills by comparison with the giants to the north. The southernmost, and lowest, of the snow-peaks peered up beyond them—just enough to enable the imagination to picture the farther ranges that mount, rank over rank, towards 'the Roof of the World'. Right-about-turn, and one's eye can feast on brilliant green fields, fed by rushing streams and rills, that fill the bottom of the basin down to the point where the valley narrows and dips on its way to join the Indus.

A lecturer's reward is the discussion that follows his talk, and I have never been better rewarded than I was today. The discussion was lively, and all on a high intellectual level. Our subject was 'security and disarmament in the Atomic Age'; but, if my argument held good and my hopes came true, that would not call for the liquidation of this Academy. The framers of its curriculum have realized that, in our age, it is not possible to become an effective professional soldier without a foundation of general knowledge. About half the time and energy of the cadets is allocated to non-military subjects which put the military part of their education in its proper setting. About one third of the personnel is drawn from social classes which used to be written off as 'non-



martial' till soldiers drawn from them won V.C.s and other high military distinctions in the Second World War. In fact, the Kakûl Academy is an educational institution which would continue to be one of Pakistan's valuable educational assets, even if the World's present efforts to achieve disarmament were to be unexpectedly rapid and complete.

'Hazâra': the word is the Persian for 'a thousand', though Persian is not the language spoken by this lovely country's inhabitants. A thousand what? I shall deem it to mean 'a thousand flocks'. For, both coming and going between Hazâra and Peshawar, the scene was a pastoral paradise. The countryside was dotted with innumerable troops of buffaloes, camels, goats, and parti-coloured sheep. At this season the host is swollen by the encampments of the Powindahs—nomad pastoralists and traders who spend their winters on the plains of Pakistan and India, and their summers in the highlands of Afghanistan. Just now they are wending their way over the Khyber Pass towards their westerly summer pastures. They have been caught by these untimely rains that should have fallen in February but have treacherously waited till March. The human members of a Powindah caravan have been steeled to brave all weathers at any season. But I notice that a precious camel, here and there, has been provided, like a Dutch cow, with a sack-cloth coat.

On our return journey, after re-descending to the plains, we escaped, at Haripur, from the dull high road and turned westward to take an alternative route skirting the east bank of the River Indus. This tree-lined avenue ran to meet a murmuring tributary that was rushing to join the great river; and, at the confluence, a magnificent landscape burst upon us. Breaking out, at last, from the long gorge in which hitherto he has been confined, Father Indus here spreads himself, mile-wide, over a plain, and rejoices to linger, slow and shallow, till his next and last gorge throttles him at Attock, where we had crossed his choking waters over the great bridge on our outward journey. Now we are pacing side by side with him on his open stretch, with nothing between us and his main channel but a belt of poppy fields.



These opium-poppies are far more lovely than their innocent sisters that infest an East Anglian farmer's fields. Both kinds of poppy are a reproach to the farmer, but this for quite different reasons. No one could say that the poppy-fields in this corner of Pakistan are monuments of bad husbandry. Their sinister crop is tended with all too much care and efficiency.

But here comes a bridge of boats, and we turn sharp right to cross the broad river-bed to its western bank. Not far below here, Alexander crossed the Indus in the reverse direction, en route to join forces with his ally the King of Taxila, and then forward to fight King Porus for the passage of the River Jhelum. Here we are in the angle between the Indus and the Kabul River, and this is a smiling land indeed: rivulet upon rivulet, field upon field, village upon village, flock upon flock. Just to pass through it is exhilarating, and my spirits sink a point or two when another bridge of boats carries us across the Kabul River and lands us at a petrol pump on the Grand Trunk Road. One might as well be on the New Jersey turnpike.

## 6. The Indus in Fetters

ONCE again I had slid back out of tribal into administered territory through the Handyside Arch, and was standing on the razor-edge roof-ridge of the Kohat Pass. The vast southward panorama that I had been gazing at longingly, this time three years ago, was once more spread out before me. Out there, on the plain far below, lay the green cantonment of Kohat town, and, beyond it, ridge after ridge ran down towards the Indus from the main chain of the Suleiman Range. Last time, a rendezvous in Beirut that could not be postponed had dragged me back through the arch and down again through the thickly-settled corner of Afridi tribal territory back to Peshawar, and thence to the airport. This year,

I have more time to play with. Today I corkscrewed down the Kohat side of the mountain to see the Indus in his fetters; and this will not be the last time, either, that I shall be threading my way through that arch. In June I shall be passing through it on a longer journey: to the Kurram valley, to Quetta, and on through Baluchistan to the sea. So, today, I have been content to visit the Indus and return.

The Indus has two fetters: Attock and Kalabagh. At Attock his wide-spread waters are suddenly confined. At Kalabagh they are as suddenly released, to spread themselves again—this time, miles wide—down all the length of Sind. Today I was bound for the Indus rail-and-road bridge at Khushhalgarh, part way down the great river's constricted track. But were we going to come out alive from the first stage of this onward journey from the pass? Corkscrew? The word is quite inadequate. The nearest that I can come to describing this hair-raising descent is to compare it with the road round the Sorrento Peninsula south of Naples. If you have ever ventured into that Italian deathtrap, you will have some notion of the descent from Kohat Pass to Kohat Town. The mountain runs down to the plain in a series of giant steps, and the road, at its critical point, clammers round three sides of one of these. To hold the road at this point, one's car must have a lizard's feet. Well, we are down, and through the cantonment, and past the new government college, heading east. The plain ends, the fields die away, and we are dodging through a stormy sea of chocolate-coloured rocks and reefs. Thank heaven they have been frozen into stone. Otherwise they would surely have engulfed us, however deftly the threatened road might turn and twist. It is this tormented landscape that hems Father Indus in: a giant stream imprisoned between the waves of a gigantic petrified ocean.

Now we are on the bridge, looking down at the river flowing below us. At first glance he seems to be gliding ever so slowly. But, when you watch the eddies on the hither side, you realize how swiftly they are chasing each other—each one of them eager to reach the exit from the prison, where



the hurrying waters can once again expand and relax. On that sunny promontory over there, below high-water-mark, a herdsman is marshalling his cattle and sheep. The cows are basking placidly on the warm rock. The sheep are huddling together apprehensively—and with good cause. For now the shepherd rounds up a batch of them and pushes them over the edge and into the inlet of the river between this promontory and the next. Is he a madman or is he a re-incarnation of the evil spirit that stampeded the Gadarene swine to their death in the Sea of Galilee? If those lean hairy swine just drowned, how can these fat fleecy sheep survive? But the shepherd turns out to be neither devil nor lunatic. He knows his business: he is just using Father Indus for giving his sheep the periodical compulsory dip that English sheep are given in an artificial concrete bath. I cannot imagine English sheep accommodating themselves to this boisterous treatment. Before they had time to drown, they would die of panic. Not so these Middle Eastern sheep: they flopped in, went under, came up again, and then, to my amazement, started calmly to swim, till they had crossed the deep inlet and were scrambling up again on to the opposite shore—shaking the water out of their fleeces like shaggy dogs. This confirms my conviction of the Middle Eastern breed's superiority. They are not only more beautiful than their English cousins; they are more spirited as well. 'Sheeplike': I should not be surprised to find that the seventeenth-century Pathan poet-chieftain Khushhal Khan, after whom this village at the bridge is named, employs the term to describe his Khattak fellow-tribesmen's valour.

The flock swims; the Indus flows; I could stand here, watching them both, all day.



## 7. A Tell like Jericho

I HAVE not yet seen a town like Alice; perhaps the Alice is unique; but today I have seen a tell like Jericho. I am standing on the summit of the greater of the two great mounds at Charsadda, the ancient capital of Gandhara in the days before the Kushan emperors transferred the seat of government to Peshawar. The Charsadda mound is like a giant footstool, planted squarely in the centre of a gigantic fives-court. This fives-court's three walls are three mountain-ranges, and its open end is demarcated by the broad River Indus. The court itself must measure more than forty by fifty (I am reckoning, not in feet, but in miles). From this commanding central point, one wins a panoramic view of the green plain extending in every direction. That line of poplars and that row of bluffs; they mark the course of one of the channels into which the Kabul River divides as it meanders diagonally across the plain to join the Indus. There must be half a dozen of these channels between the point where the Kabul and the Swat rivers unite and the further point where they reunite under the lee of the Khattak mountains. These channels are like North European streams—Cherwell, Avon, Ouse, or Elbe. They flow at a bullock-cart's placid pace between green banks overhung by trees. Only, in this land of intermittent rains, they are bled to feed innumerable canals and runnels that irrigate the fertile fields. The fields bear crops of wheat, rice, and sugar-cane; and, in the orchards, apricots alternate with oranges, plums, and pears. If you can imagine a blend between Lombardy and the Ghutah of Damascus, you will be able to conjure up Gandhara in your mind's eye. But Gandhara has one feature that is all its own: the rivers that break their way painfully through the mountain-ranges and then spread themselves joyously over the plain. I had seen the Kabul River burst out at Warsak and the Indus below Amb; today I have seen the Swat River performing the same feat at Abazai. The rock-walls, that have constricted its

waters for miles on end, here suddenly relax their grip, and the liberated torrent surges forward with the impetus of a shell shooting from the cannon's mouth. On the very threshold of the plain, a heavy toll of water is taken from the river to supply a grand canal; yet below the take-off there is no noticeable diminution in the river's volume. Nourished by the snows of distant Chitral, the Swat River here must have at least as great a volume as the Thames at Reading, yet this is merely one tributary of a tributary. No wonder the plain is well-watered. And no wonder that one new irrigation system after another is being engineered in order to make the hitherto unused waters fructify.

This plain, with its agricultural wealth, has been a key point on the overland route between the Sub-continent and the rest of the Old World. For how many thousand years has Gandhara played this part? You can measure the time by the height of this mound at Charsadda on which I am standing. The mound has been built up out of layers of the debris of sun-dried brick buildings. It has mounted a few feet more, each time that dust has returned to dust, till it has risen at least as high as the mound of Jericho. Its stature represents a continuous history of human occupation extending over a span of perhaps three thousand years. But at Jericho the same stature must represent twice or three times that length of time. For, at Jericho, the fields that nurtured the city were irrigated by a single spring, while the city of Charsadda was fed by this maze of rivers fertilising the great green plain.

Some fifteen hundred years have passed since the mound at Charsadda ceased to grow. Probably it never recovered from being sacked by the Huns in the fifth or sixth century of the Christian Era. But the later deposits of civilization that are missing at Charsadda are present in the fort of Shabkadar, which I visited this morning. Here the upper storey is Victorian British; the lower storey is early-nineteenth-century Sikh; and the hill on which the Sikh invaders planted their stronghold might contain layers coeval with the latest at Charsadda. Today, the fort at Shabkadar is garrisoned by



the Pakistan Army's frontier force. Sikhs and British in their turn have come and gone, and the monuments of their fleeting occupation testify to the transitoriness of human efforts and achievements. Yet some human achievements do endure. Travel on eastwards from Charsadda to Takht-i-Bhai, and you will find a monument that has quietly conquered time. Takht-i-Bhai is an isolated mountain that rises abruptly from the plain above the village of Shahr-i-Bahlol. It does not rise very high by comparison with the glistening sierras of the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas, which are visible from the summit of Takht-i-Bhai in clear weather. Measured from plain-level, the altitude of Takht-i-Bhai may be not more than about a thousand feet. But its precipitous flanks and razor-sharp ridges make it a true mountain in miniature. And its steep shoulders carry the massive remains of a Buddhist monastery.

Here the monks attained the goal of their austere spiritual exercises. They won their way out of this world of appetite and recurrence into the serenity of the timeless state, and this serene timelessness pervades their empty courts and cells. Down below, the plain is still fast bound in the grip of Karma. Down there, crops and cultures have never ceased to change. Shahr-i-Bahlol is an archaeologist's happy hunting-ground. It stands on the site of a city of the Gandharan Age. Climb the peak of the mountain from the monastery and look over the top, and you will see, below you, a post-war sugar-cane crushing mill. On the plain, the wheel of life is turning at an accelerating pace. But up there, on the mountain, all is still.



## 8. To the Indus in Alexander's Tracks

No crossing of a river could be more dramatic than the present-day crossing of the Indus en route from Kabul and Peshawar to Pindi and Lahore. From Nowshera onwards, running eastward, the road skirts the south bank of the Kabul River along its last reach, and passes the point where—at the end of its long journey—the river discharges itself into the Indus. At this point the Indus is still wandering slowly in a maze of channels through a sprawling sandy bed. But, as one passes the watersmeet and turns down-stream, sharp right, the combined waters gather themselves together, push their way out of the open plain into a brim-full gorge, and break into a run. From the opposite heights overhanging the eastern lip of the gorge's mouth, the Emperor Akbar's massive fortress sends its two lines of curtain-walls down to the river's edge. Below, the road is spanned by a British-built road-and-rail bridge.

Attock Bridge and Attock Fort are both famous today, but, viewed in the perspective of history, both are novelties. It was natural that nineteenth-century engineers should choose a gorge with rocky sides as their site for throwing a bridge across a great river. It is perhaps more surprising that a sixteenth-century empire-builder should have chosen the same reach of the river as his point for carrying an army across on a bridge of boats or ferrying it across, piece-meal, on a flotilla of inflated skins. Till very recent times, inflated skins have been the normal means of crossing the Indus; and, down to Akbar's day, the users of this traditional form of conveyance—soldiers, pilgrims, merchants, or whoever they might be—consistently shunned those reaches of the Indus in which the river rushes, bunched together, through a gorge. They preferred to make their passage somewhere where they

could catch him sauntering, all over the place, across a plain.

There is a plain that begins at the eastern foot of the Khyber Pass and goes on and on, without a break, till it dips below sea-level at the head of the Bay of Bengal; and this great plain is traversed by the Indus not far from the plain's western end. Breaking out into the plain from the mouth of a gorge at the southern foot of the Himalayas, the Indus gratefully slows down, spreads out, and takes it easy during the short breathing-space that the law of gravitation allows him before it pushes him into the gorge that catches him by the throat at Attock. While he is crossing the intervening stretch of plain between gorge and gorge, the Indus is in an indulgent mood. And the mid-point of this stretch was the place where travellers preferred to cross him until Akbar broke with the ancient custom. Alexander, too, had broken with many ancient customs in his day, but not with this one. On his way to invade India, he had made his crossing of the Indus at the traditional place. The spot is marked, on the river's western bank, by the ruins of the four-square fort of Hund. The surviving fortifications do not date from Alexander's time, but, no doubt, there was always a fort here till Akbar put the present one out of commission by building his fortress at Attock. Anyway, Hund is a landmark. And, as I wanted to see the ancient crossing as well as the modern one, we set out for Hund one Sunday morning—Maulana, Professor, and I—from the campus of the University of Peshawar.

On the far side of Mardan, I noticed that the road from Swat joined our road from Peshawar in the neighbourhood of Shahbazgarh, where the Emperor Ashoka set up a pair of inscriptions. Ashoka's choice of site indicated that the road-junction must have been hereabouts already in his time. Was it here, or farther west at Charsadda, that Alexander, emerging from the northern valleys in which he had had to fight so hard to force a passage, joined up again with the detachment of his army that had marched Indus-wards by a more southerly route? Anyway, by the time we reached Swabi, we



were certainly on the tracks of the united Macedonian army. We reached Swabi; we reached Ambar; and, at Ambar, Hund-on-Indus is only two miles away. From the road we could see the trees that marked the location of Hund village. But this was as near to our goal as the pukka road would take us. From here onwards it ran southward, parallel to the Indus, to cross the Kabul River over the bridge of boats at Jahangiri. If we were to reach Hund from Ambar, we must abandon the pukka road and commit ourselves to a kuccha one.

Coming from England, I could not understand why my companions now pulled such long faces. (I did understand before the day was over.) In England the distinction between a main road and a side road is not clear-cut. A main road may be no straighter than a side road is, and a side road will have as good a surface as a main road has. So the going is about as good on the one kind of road as on the other. Translating pukka and kuccha into these English terms, I had not taken this sub-continental distinction at all tragically. I realized the extent of my misconception when, two hundred yards down the kuccha road to Hund from Ambar, our car stuck. We extricated it with some difficulty, manoeuvred it back on to the pukka road, and started for Hund again, this time in a tonga.

This time all seemed well. The tonga lurched on, with ease, over the mud-hole that had pulled our car up short. It lurched on farther; the trees of Hund came nearer; and then, suddenly, a hidden tributary of the Indus came into view across our path. It was not a large stream, but it was in spate. How deep was it? We could measure its depth on the bodies of two grey-bearded men who were standing in the water, washing themselves in preparation for the Id. The water did not come up to their shoulders, and the tonga-driver was a sportsman. He made a dash for it, and we were across. When we lurched into Hund through the village's western gate and parked our tonga just inside, we were in high spirits; and our spirits rose further when we walked out through the eastern gate on to the remains of a paved causeway leading down



towards the river. This must be the point where everyone, including Alexander, had crossed, before Akbar made his revolutionary break with tradition.

Standing on the western edge of the westernmost of the river's many branches, we saw a vista of alternating water-channels, sand-banks, and jungle-clad islands. We could not, of course, see the opposite bank. The river-bed at this point is six miles wide. Our cicerone was an English-speaking Hundi home for a holiday from service with an American family in Karachi. A practised Hundi ferryman, he told us, could convey from shore to shore a cargo of 180 pounds' weight on a single inflated buffalo-hide. One hundred and eighty pounds! That is nearly three times the free allowance for a first-class passenger on an international flight. So, when Alexander's army crossed, one inflated buffalo-hide would have been an amply sufficient conveyance for one Macedonian infantryman and his arms (helmet, target, and sixteen-foot-long pike). There might even have been room, besides, for the portable loot that the soldier had collected on his long march to the Indus from the Hellespont.

Having thus followed in Alexander's tracks as far as embarkation point, we had now to regain the pukka road and rejoin our car. Would the flood-water in the smaller river that we had to re-cross have risen or fallen while we had been lingering on the greater river's bank? When we arrived at the little river again, the two bathers had disappeared. Had they been submerged? Or had they merely got tired of standing in the ice-cold water? Anyway, they were no longer there, so this time we had no measure of the water's depth. The only way to gauge it now was the awkward method of trial and error. Once again, we descended into the flood; but, this time, the horse halted obstinately in mid-stream. Throwing the reins over the animal's neck, the driver climbed down into the water to try the effect of pushing the tonga forward from behind. The effect was electric. The horse bolted. Dashing forward, he cleared the stream, mounted the farther bank, and carried us on hurtling over bushes and briars. 'Take the reins, Your Reverence, take the reins,' shouted the driver,

now left far behind in the river-bed. But Maulana, Professor, and I were all immobilised. We were doubled up in fits of helpless laughter. So we hurtled on, care-free, till the horse stopped as abruptly as he had started. It had been an hilarious day.

## 9. Two Forts a Day

I AM in Rajasthan, and at the heart of it; for this is Ajmer; and Ajmer is the long-since recognized key-point in this wide-spread country. Mediaeval Muslim missionaries, sixteenth-century Mughal emperors, nineteenth-century British strategists and railway-engineers, and finally the man who had the brilliant idea of founding Mayo College: all these wayfarers have seized on Ajmer and established something there. So, today, Ajmer is a railway town, a public school campus, and a Muslim pilgrimage resort. Does not the Dargah Mosque contain the tomb of Khwaja Mu'inn ad-Din Chisti? But, as I sit here in the garden of the Headmaster's house, my eyes are set on none of these things. They are drawn, like a needle by a magnet, to the top of Taragarh. This precipitous four-square mountain that overhangs the city would be attractive, just for its virgin shape, even if Man had left it untouched; but the battlemented wall along the sky-line makes it irresistible. I cannot leave Ajmer without having looked down on the city from that towering fort. . . .

I have drunk my fill of the Jain architecture of the Jhompra Mosque. Those exquisitely carved columns and coffered ceilings are said to have been converted from Jain to Muslim use in two and a half days by the fiat of a Muslim ruler. But we must not linger down here. Every minute now will tell against us in our race with the mounting Sun. Our car, parked under a tree below the mosque, has reached the limit for wheels; and a local dog has attached himself to us expectantly. He knows that we must go up from here on foot,



and he guesses that some share of the food in our pockets may come his way if he makes the ascent in our company.

The climb begins gently. On the first stretch the gradient is hardly perceptible, and the paved path is shaded by trees. Without much exertion we have reached the fort's outermost gate. But this is much less than half way up from city-level to summit, and beyond the gate the zigzags begin. Happily, at this early hour, the western face of the rock is still in shadow, so we clamber up in the shade, while an amazing network of fortress walls comes into view around us. These walls embrace a whole valley, as well as the crown of the hill; and one wall reinforces another in a lavish expenditure of labour. At last we are through the topmost gate and are making the round of the curtain-wall that I had first seen so far above me. The whole panorama opens out: the Ana Sagar band and lake; the walled city; the Dargah Mosque; the railway workshops; and the passes threading through the mountains into the endless plains beyond.

At this point I fancied that the day's hardest work was behind me, but I was wrong. Sand blowing over the pavement made the descent treacherously slippery; the mounting of the Sun annihilated the shade; and we must now speed on to climb Madaliya Fort, thirty-four miles away from Ajmer city. Rajasthan contains at least as many ravishing forts per square mile as Italy or Greece; so the minimum standard of activity for the sight-seer is two forts a day.

A long drink, a late lunch, an overdue sleep, and I am roused at 4.00 p.m. to make the ascent of Madaliya before driving back to Mayo College to give a talk to the boys. Well, what of it? Compared to Taragarh, this little fort-covered crag will surely be child's play. But, no. At 4.00 p.m. the Sun was still almost at his fiercest; I had the morning's exertions in my bones; I was half dazed with unfinished sleep; and Madaliya crag made up for its miniature size by being as spiky as a porcupine. This second climb was the crux of the day's work. How I longed for one of those acrobatic horses on which, I was assured, the Rajput barons had ridden up in the good old feudal days. I just do not know how I reached



the cleft into which the Rajput conquerors' unfortunate Bheel predecessors had been hurled to their deaths. Nor do I know how I crawled through the single postern gate, or staggered up on to the topmost roof. All I know is that, at 7.00 p.m. that evening, in the soft light of a full moon, I was sticking my neck out on the college campus. At my peril, I was telling those Kshatriya public-school boys that, if they wanted to know the Afrikaans word for 'caste', 'apartheid' was it. What a day!

## 10. Forts and Huts

CAN you imagine King Henry VII and Lord Attlee telescoped into one single super-leveller? If you can, you will have gained some notion of the social revolution that has broken, like a thunderclap, over Rajasthan. Only yesterday, the rajahs and thakurs were still in the saddle. Rajasthan was a galaxy of twenty-three Rajput principalities, with their princes' prerogatives secured by treaties with the British Government of India. Today, the Rajput princes and barons have gone the way of the British Raj itself. And they have not only lost their sovereignty and their feudal rights. In the act of becoming private citizens, they have come under the harrow of the revenue authorities—state and federal. Expenditure taxes and inheritance taxes are now fast eating into their private fortunes. Their impoverished grandchildren will probably beg to be relieved of the honorary titles that have been left to the present generation out of a slightly ironical sense of courtesy.

This sudden forfeiture of long-enjoyed privileges is bound to be painful. But it is not more painful in Rajasthan than it is in England or America, and, anyway, it is the common lot. The same thing is happening all over the World; and one cannot regret it, however much one may sympathise with individual hard cases. In Rajasthan, at any rate, this putting

down of the mighty from their seat has been long overdue; for here the contrast between wealth and poverty has been intolerably sharp. Rajasthan is a lean country. Yet massive forts, interminable walls recalling the Great Wall of China itself, and sumptuous palaces have been wrung out of Rajasthan's skinny plains and bony mountains by the poor peasants' Rajput masters. Since my previous visit to Jodhpur, thirty-one years ago, the last ruler but one had erected a new palace culminating in a dome of the order of magnitude of the dome of St. Paul's. And even the older palaces, and the lesser forts and country-houses of the Rajput landed-gentry, have been fitted up with modern conveniences: bathrooms, electric light, refrigerators, and the rest of the present-day American apparatus, while the peasants' huts and hovels have remained what they always have been.

Today, however, 'the wind of change' is sweeping through the passes in the mountains and on over the face of the desert. The local application of the All-India Community Development Plan is initiating a transfer of wealth; the Rajasthan State Administrative Devolution Plan is initiating a simultaneous transfer of power. Both movements are still in their creeping, creaking initial stage. But both may be expected gradually to gather momentum; and, within the span of a generation, they seem likely, between them, to transform life in Rajasthan out of all recognition. New wells, new by-roads, new schools, and, above all, new men at the helm in the village and in the rural district: these are so many seeds of salutary change.

The change may even be a blessing in disguise for the dispossessed princes and barons themselves. In the Pre-British Age, they were kept on their toes by having to hold with the sword what they had previously won by it. The advent of the British regime gave them a previously undreamed-of security of tenure without demanding any public service from them in return. In this last phase of their ascendancy the great event in a Rajput rajah's or thakur's life was no longer the capture of a fort or the winning of a battle; it was his year as a prefect at Mayo College; and, as often as not, he would then retire to



his country estate to live out the rest of his days in the retrospective role of an 'old boy'. The rentier's son will now have to take to earning his living if he is to find the money to pay his own children's school-fees; and the Rajput's vigour may then become an asset for India instead of being an incubus upon her. And what about the vigour of the Bheels and other pre-Rajput peoples of Rajasthan on whom the Rajput rulers and landlords have hitherto sat so heavily? If the State Devolution Plan goes well, the strength of the suppressed majority will make itself felt in the panchayats (the rural district councils). Hard countries are apt to produce hardy people. Rajasthan is about as hard a country as there could be. The hardness of its people may now at last be going to have a chance of putting itself into action in constructive work.

## II. The Man who Dared

HE was an unassuming little man. His complexion was dark enough to have accommodated one of those magnificent crimson or saffron-gold turbans that are the fashion in Jaipur and Marwar. But he wore a modest white turban, and his spindly legs were bare. There was nothing to tell you of his prowess except the sunny smile on his face. But this spoke volumes. It told the story of the exceptional man who had dared, and whose daring had paid dividends.

A few years ago, this enterprising Rajasthani peasant's parcel of land had been indistinguishable from the sandy waste across which our car had been ploughing its way from the main road. Even the waste was criss-crossed with ditches and dykes to catch and canalise the monsoon rains. Yet this labour had left it still practically valueless. In its virgin state it could do no more for Man than provide exiguous pasture for a few goats and sheep. But my modest friend's achievement showed what could be done to the rest of this forbidding landscape if his fellow-peasants were as adventurous as he



had been. This hero had dared to borrow 2500 rupees from a money lender; the government had lent him an equal amount; and with this 5000 he had sunk a well and had bought and installed a petrol-driven pump. As a result, he had been able to irrigate fifteen acres of his holding. He had planted this plot with papayas. And, since his land lay within a night's journey, by bullock-cart, of the city of Jaipur, he was paying off his debts and winning a profit for himself that was making him the envy of his neighbours. Just as we arrived, the nightly bullock-cart, laden with papaya fruit, was starting off for the city. Slow and sure as a bullock-cart is, it would be certain to arrive. The dykes and dips that had baffled our car would have no terrors for those stalwart hooves and wheels. Early tomorrow morning, for certain, the cart would have delivered its load of fruit in the city market, and it would be back at its owner's papaya-garden before the heat of the day—to do the same journey, and win the same profit, the next evening.

This story of the man who dared is pregnant with the future of Rajasthan. There is nothing wrong with the soil: this contains all the chemical components necessary for producing a wide variety of fruits and crops. But the Rajasthan soil's potential fertility needs the magic touch of water to bring it to life; and irrigation requires human daring. Today, India is being daring collectively as well as individually. Within a few years from now, the westernmost and thirstiest fringe of Rajasthan, along the Indo-Pakistani border, is going to be brought to life by the digging of what will be the longest irrigation-canal in the World up to date. Though the climate is torrid, the soil, here too, is good. When the water reaches it, it will grow wheat, maize, oil-plants, citrus fruit, and even grapes. Two million people will live by agriculture in an area which, at present, maintains no more than 100,000 pastoralists. Having heard of this scheme at Jaisalmer, I had the good fortune, at Jaipur airport, to meet the engineer in charge. This canal is a sub-continent's admirable adventure; yet I admire, even more, the little man who dared, all by himself, to make his fifteen acres bear fruit.

## 12. World's End?

FROM Jodhpur to Jaisalmer the road had been an easier option than the Great North Road from London to York: about the same length and as good a surface, but an easier getaway and no frustrating traffic—save for an occasional flock of sheep and goats flowing slowly across the tarmac. But the ten miles from Jaisalmer to Ludra were more arduous than the two hundred from York to Edinburgh. Beyond the Maharana's guest-house, the tarmac stopped, and simultaneously the sandy desert that had extended to the horizon along the previous stretch gave way to ribs of rock. Only a jeep could take us on, and the driver's rock-riding skill could not save us from more than ten per cent. of the heart-rattling jolts and jars. After we had passed the bund and the irrigated garden below it, the vegetation gave out. There was not even the thorny scrub that, on the sand-desert, nourished so surprisingly large a head of livestock. Surely here we had reached World's End. But, just as I was thinking so, three motor-buses and a station-waggon came lurching round a corner, packed with passengers already on the return journey from our destination. At Ludra, for which we were bound, there is a Jain temple containing a hallowed image of the last Jain tirthankara but one, and these human bus-loads were pilgrims returning from a pilgrimage that had been the life-long ambition of every man and woman in the party. The rich Jain business man who had paid the expenses had killed at least three birds with one stone. He had enabled a number of his co-religionists to acquire merit; in the act, he had acquired multiple merit for himself; and he had avoided (*not* evaded) income-tax. Under Indian income-tax law, his financing of this pilgrimage ranked as a charitable expenditure. In consequence, it was exempt from tax. And, since he had to part with the money in any event, he naturally preferred to gain merit with it for himself and others as an alternative to augmenting the Inland Revenue's



receipts. There could be no mistake about how the hedonistic calculus worked out, and this particular calculator was not the only Jain millionaire to do the sum and take the necessary action. Next day, on the way back from Jaisalmer to Jodhpur, we passed a procession of no less than eighteen Jain-filled buses outward bound. A richer Jain was acquiring vaster merit at the forbearing Inland Revenue's expense; so the rocky desert west of Jaisalmer was almost as populous in Jain pilgrims as the sandy desert east of this golden city was in sheep and goats.

The Rajasthan desert is magically productive. Not content with conjuring livestock out of sand, and a pilgrim traffic out of the Inland Revenue's stony heart, it has produced a city of ten thousand souls out of a bund that holds, for a twelve-month, the bucketful of water that is dropped there by the annual monsoon. And what a city! From the meanest tenement to the grandest mansion, it is built of the local golden-coloured stone, and the masonry is carved into a fretwork of projecting balconies, upholding stone-latticed windows. I will not speak of the world-famous house of the merchant. This is a show-piece. The beauty of the carving on the ordinary houses is more impressive. At Jaisalmer, Nature has grudged Man even an ear of wheat and a cup of water; and Man has retorted by adorning Nature with human art. The richest man in the United States could not afford to build for himself as beautiful a house as the poorest man in Jaisalmer inherits as his birthright.

Except in the small hours of the morning and the previous hours of the night, the sandy desert between Jaisalmer and Jodhpur is a burning fiery furnace. Nevertheless, on the day after our arrival, we dallied in Jaisalmer, against sage advice, in order to mount the citadel and visit one of the Jain temples on the top. It would have been madness to leave the citadel unvisited. We should have missed the ravishing view of city, bund, and desert that unfolded itself when we climbed up to the palace roof. We should not have noticed that, along the top of each successive curtain-wall commanding the zig-zag ramp up which we had ascended, a row of huge golden-



coloured stone balls was poised, ready to be pushed over on to our heads if, while we were in mid course, the châtelain had decided to wipe us out. Above all, we should not have had a glimpse of the Jain manuscripts, preserved in a crypt under the temple and protected for the future against the wreckful siege of battering days by the very latest modern contrivances. (Did the Jain millionaire, who paid for this, succeed in debiting the item to his income-tax account, I wonder?) However, this sight-seeing had its price. We did not start on our return journey till an hour before noon, and, travelling eastward, as we now were, at this time of day, we were exposing our radiators to the full force of the Sun. Soon the radiators of both cars were boiling over. They repeated this performance at shorter and shorter intervals. And the accumulated sum of our enforced pauses to allow the radiators to cool down was just great enough to cause us to miss the plane from Jodhpur to New Delhi. As we drew up at Jodhpur airfield, the plane was taking off, and I was due to give a lecture in New Delhi the next day. So, by the light of a full moon, we drove on, through another 135 miles of Rajasthan, to Ajmer, and arrived there just in time to get on board the night mail-train to Delhi.

Boiling radiators! What a country! How can the desert feed as much as a single mosquito? I do not know the answer to this question. But I do know that, whenever we passed one of the Rajasthan desert's rare wells, hundreds of sheep, goats, camels, and cattle were queued up, in well-disciplined platoons, waiting patiently for their turn to drink. I half expected to see Jacob himself having his fateful first meeting with Rachel at the life-giving well's lip. Is there any other desert, anywhere else in the World, that is so prolific?

## 13. Mewar

'Your lecture tonight at Udaipur is at 7.30 p.m.' were the professor's first words as he greeted us at Udaipur airport. No lecture had been on my programme, so I had come unprovided with notes, and indeed with a subject. And it was not helpful when the professor went on to say that the Commissioner would be delighted to hear me lecture on any subject in the world that I might choose. Well, 7.30 was still nine hours away, and Udaipur airport is 15 miles out of Udaipur on the Chittor road. It was now or never for Chittor; and we headed the professor's car in that direction. The distance was 68 miles each way. So there would be just time to snatch some lunch at Chittor railway-station, mount the citadel, climb the Tower of Victory, make the round of the walls, and have half an hour to spare at Udaipur for rest, bath, and lucubration before the lecture-hour overtook me.

This dash to Chittor and back would have been worth while just for the sight of the intervening country, even if Chittor fort had sunk below the ground while we were on our way. The southern fringe of Rajasthan is the moistest and greenest strip of this semi-desert country. Here there are running streams and continuous fields of wheat and millet. It gives a foretaste of Rajasthan's southern neighbour Gujarat, of which I had had a glimpse thirty-one years ago. In this southern clime the harvest had already been reaped, and, everywhere, men and women were winnowing the grain from the chaff. The purples and yellows of the women's saris outshone the colours worn in the other parts of Rajasthan that I had visited. Gaily piebald sheep and goats were feasting on the stubble-fields. Altogether, it was a cheerful scene.

Rajasthan is a low tableland ruckled into ridges or twisted up into clumps of mountains here and there. Wherever the surface has been tilted and tormented in these ways, there is water. And, wherever there is water, there is an outburst of life: a fortress, a palace, a city, a shrine, or a cluster of shops



in which beautiful things are not merely sold but are made. Forty or fifty miles out from Udaipur airport, the ground began to undulate and break into a spray of jagged rocks, and then foot-hills and mountains began to appear on the horizon. After a time, through a gap in the hills, a long, flat-topped mountain rose into view. Could this, by chance, be the fort of Chittor? I knew that it was huge, but I had not been prepared for a fortress on this scale. Yet, sure enough, this great ridge was the goal of our present journey; and, before we reached the railway, we could see the massive man-made walls crowning the top of the long mountain's precipitous flank. The length of this Rajput acropolis is two and a half miles, and its breadth, at its broadest, must be half a mile at least. So, on the wall-girt summit, there is room not only for palaces, temples, towers, and tanks, but also for fields. In fact, the summit could yield enough bread and water to sustain a frugal Rajput garrison for years. A river, flowing round the foot of the great rock, provides a natural moat for about half the perimeter. When the local Rajput ruler defied the Mughal emperor Akbar, he believed that Chittor fort was impregnable. But this mediaeval-minded Rajput strategist had not reckoned with the Mughal invader's Turkish art of gunnery. Akbar raised mounds high enough to allow his artillery to play upon the walls, and it played havoc. The walls were breached; the fort was stormed; for the Rajputs it was an undreamed-of catastrophe.

It was a catastrophe, but not a crushing one. Forbidden to re-fortify Chittor, the Rajput rulers of Mewar did better. In a remoter corner of their territory, they conjured up, out of nothing, a new capital city that foiled the Mughals at the next trial of strength. Udaipur, like Chittor, depends on natural defences supplemented by human art; but here Nature has been enlisted to serve quite a different strategic plan. Instead of being planted, like Chittor fort, on the top of a mountain, Udaipur city nestles in a basin surrounded by a continuous mountain-wall. The approach to Udaipur from the airport is like the approach to Alice Springs. The road

seems to be running, full tilt, at this mountain rampart. What will happen to our radiator—and to ourselves—when we ram the rock? And then, at the last moment, a cleft opens and we drive through it. At Udaipur the cleft is bridged by a fortified gate, and, on either side, battlemented curtain-walls climb the mountain-flanks up to a level where these become too precipitous to give a would-be invader any foothold. Here Akbar's victory at Chittor was avenged upon Akbar's great-grandson Aurangzeb. From this gate, Aurangzeb's invading army was flung back. Our car, however, was not being denied entry; so we shot through the gate, whizzed past a flurry of grey monkeys, and found ourselves inside the mountain-girt basin, with the first of Udaipur's local man-made lakes soon making its appearance on our left as we drove towards the city.

This lake-ringed Rajput capital has been painted, photographed, and described so many times in the course of the last 150 years that a repetition would be boring. Of course I have carried away with me an unforgettable mental vision of sound and colour: the women beating the clothes that they have washed; the bathers splashing in the water; the water-level view from the water-palaces, and the kite-level view from the city-palace roof. But what impressed me most was not the beauty of the scene or the massiveness and sumptuousness of the buildings. It was the indomitableness of the people. Like ants whose nest has been destroyed, they turned to, without pausing, to build another. The fall of Chittor was the signal for Udaipur to rise. The Rajput princes who gave the word of command were figures from the ancient world, and, with the rest of the ancient world, they are being swept out of the swiftly changing India of our day. But the people who translated those formidable commands into living realities are still on the map. These twentieth-century descendants of the sixteenth-century builders of Udaipur will surely make their mark on our new 'One World' that is now in the act of arising.



## 14. Catching the Bus

AFTER half a day of sight-seeing at Udaipur, I had flown back to a hospitable house in New Delhi in which I was to have a two days' rest before setting out for Afghanistan. For weeks past, my air-ticket from New Delhi to Kabul had been lying at New Delhi in the British Council's safe, side by side with my passport, duly visaed. I was to leave the ground at New Delhi in the cool of the morning and to land at Kabul after a five hours' flight. 'You had better look at this telegram', said my host, after having first fortified me with a whiskey. I did look, and was knocked flat. 'Kabul airport out of action,' ran the telegram from my prospective host and travelling-companion in Kabul. 'Strongly advise take lorry from Peshawar Wednesday morning.'

Wednesday morning! And this was Sunday evening, and Easter Sunday at that. Tomorrow—Easter Monday—the British Council office in New Delhi would not be functioning. And anyway it had already been ascertained that there was no combination of plane-services that would bring me from New Delhi to Peshawar before Thursday at the earliest. That Wednesday morning's lorry from Peshawar to Kabul must be caught without fail. It was a once-a-week service. So, if I missed it, my arrival in Kabul might be delayed for an unpredictable number of days, and then the time-table of my circular tour round Afghanistan would be thrown out. I had planned that tour many months back, and had set the dates to fit in with my travelling-companion's exacting schedule of engagements. I just could not afford to miss that lorry; so, travelling on the ground over the combined breadth of the Indian and the Pakistani Panjab, I must be in Peshawar by Wednesday at dawn. Dawn was the latest permissible hour; for all that I knew about that lorry's time-table was that it had to make the journey from Peshawar to Kabul within the day. It was a very full day's journey and more—particularly, no doubt, in this exceptional year when the roads were being

cut to bits by heavy rains out of due season. Obviously that lorry could not wait for a passenger whose arrival-time in Peshawar was uncertain. It would be awful to arrive on Wednesday morning after the lorry had left. It would be a forlorn hope to pursue it over the Khyber in a taxi.

So I must be on board the Khyber Mail reaching Peshawar Cantonment Station at 6.15 a.m. on Wednesday morning, and the Deputy High Commissioner's office in Peshawar must be informed that they could count on expecting me to turn up there and then. But this would mean leaving New Delhi for Lahore by the Frontier Mail on Monday night, and, even if I could succeed in telescoping my Tuesday's programme in New Delhi into my Monday's, could I get berths, at this eleventh hour, on either of these two much-travelled-in trains? On the Indian and Pakistani night-trains, all berths are booked up at least as far in advance as I had booked my foundered air-passage from New Delhi to Kabul. All the same, I must be on board those two trains on the two successive nights of Monday and Tuesday. I made a resolve that, if the worst came to the worst, I would ask the entire staff of the British Council office at New Delhi and the office at Lahore to escort me to the railway station, form a rucker scrum, and propel me and my luggage into a third-class carriage, where seats are unreserved and seating is therefore unobtainable. Once grouted in, my body would be held upright by the adjoining upright bodies of my fellow travellers—and, after all, I could, if necessary, be carried on a stretcher from the first train to the second and from the second to the lorry. In this way I could make certain of catching the bus. But, as it turned out, it did not come to that. It did not, because the British Council in New Delhi worked night and day for me on what should have been their Easter holiday, and also because their New Delhi staff and their Lahore staff each included more than one wizard. On two nights running, these wizards conjured last-minute berths for me out of thin air; so I made my long train-journey in comfort. . . .

On Easter Monday evening at 6.45 p.m., in Maulana Azad



Road, New Delhi, the rain was pattering on the roof of Dr Radhakrishnan's house as I said good-bye to him and made for Old Delhi station. Rain in Delhi on the 18th April! This was something unheard-of. If this was happening here, what might it not be like on the mountains between Peshawar and Kabul? Meanwhile, for catching the first of my obligatory two trains, we had not much time to lose—so we thought, assuming that this train was going to start on time. As it happened, my sleeping-car sat in Old Delhi station for two hours, waiting for the Bombay section of the train to join up with it. Never mind, there was half a day to spare between train and train. So I fell asleep and woke up next morning to find myself no nearer to Peshawar than Amballa. Half Tuesday's daylight passed in reaching Amritsar and filling in forms on both the Indian and the Pakistani side of the partition-line. The face of a friend, on the look-out for me at Lahore station, was welcome indeed, but he brought me dismal news. Not one berth of any kind on tonight's Khyber Mail was to be had, and this information was confirmed in a melancholy tone by the young woman in the railway berth reservations office in Lahore city. At this stage, I did not dare to hope that the previous night's act of wizardry might be repeated. Yet repeated it was; I crossed the Attock Bridge asleep; and at 6.15 a.m. on Wednesday morning I duly tumbled out of the Khyber Mail on to the platform of Peshawar Cantonment station.

What was the next move? I must think and act quickly. Should I take a tonga to the U.K. Deputy High Commissioner's office in Mackeson Road? But at that moment all my problems were solved. A voice sounded in my dazed ears, and the voice said golden words: 'Is this Professor Toynbee? I have come from the Deputy High Commissioner's office to meet you.' So, thanks to the inexhaustible resourcefulness and kindness of friends in need, I had caught the bus after all. Six-fifteen; bath; breakfast; nine o'clock; the lorry was off, and I was in it.

## 15. Through the Looking-glass

WE have all of us seen a bumble-bee or a sparrow trapped in a room and bewildered by beating its wings against the windowpane. The poor creature sees the great open spaces of the free world outside as clearly as if there were no invisible obstacle in between. It cannot make out what is preventing it from passing. Its struggles display the very acme of frustration and dismay. A human being can have a corresponding experience. I had had it, myself, twice over, at Torkham, where the road passes out of Pakistan into Afghanistan at the western foot of the Khyber Pass.

From the Pakistan side of the frontier-chain across the road, one can just see the gleaming white left shoulder of the high Hindu Kush that crowns the valleys of Nuristan. If one could edge one's way a few feet farther westward or climb a few feet higher, perhaps one might see the whole of that snow-capped mountain mass. Perhaps one might also see the Kabul River diving into the gorge from which it shoots out again, on the Pakistan side of the frontier, at Warsak. The eager observer rapidly glances left and right. The leftward glance is not encouraging. Leftward, a Behistan-like crag towers up, with a fortress of the Emperor Ashoka's on its summit. Even if the gradient were a possible one for a seventy-one-year-old, he would have to clamber up with one foot on either side of the frontier, and that would be asking for trouble. But rightward, look, a path slopes gently upwards, in a north-north-westerly direction, just on the Pakistan side of the whitewashed stones that mark the frontier. The eager observer mounts this inviting ramp, only to find that he is no farther forward. The only new thing that he sees from the brow of the incline is a spur of the northern mountain-wall of the Khyber Pass, with a Pakistani fort perched on it. The snow-cap and the gorge are no more visible from here than from below; and, even if time and tactfulness allowed the inquirer to traverse the intervening three-quarters of a mile,



the view from the fort would, no doubt, be screened by the next spur beyond that. Once again, the bumble-bee has beaten his wings in vain against the invisible pane of glass; and, as he recoils, baffled, over the hump of the Khyber Pass, a feeling of claustrophobia overcomes him. Perhaps he will find himself caged, for good and all, between these forbidding mountain-walls. A weight lifts from his heart when he redescends to Jamrud without having been stopped by any invisible obstacle at this end of the giant mouse-trap.

Approaching Jamrud for the third time in my life this morning, I felt my spirits rise; for, at this my third attempt, I was to sail through that invisible pane at Torkham which had baffled me twice. This time my passport contained a visa from the Afghan consulate-general in New Delhi and a permit to enter Afghanistan by this route from the Afghan consulate at Peshawar. I was on board Her Britannic Majesty's lorry bound for Kabul. What could stop me this time? At Torkham nothing did. So today I had the experience of seeing the other side of the Moon. As we rolled on over the lowered frontier-chain and then along the Afghan road, the whole of Nuristan's snow-crown came into view, this time, round the corner of Pakistan's fort-crowned mountain-spur, and the Kabul River shone out like silver on my right before it dived, behind my right shoulder, into the mouth of the Warsak gorge. Now Kabul itself was as good as in my pocket. But, at this moment of unguarded exhilaration, the river god gave me a warning. The road suddenly broke off short, and two lines of heaped-up stones guided us into a shingle-bed down which at least five separate torrents were coursing on their way to join the Kabul River from the Safed Koh. The 'lorry' was a powerful creature, but it was also ponderous and bulky. It was, in fact, an outsize version of one of those delivery vans that block the streets of London; and the shingle-bed was most unlike a London street. When we cleared the last of the five torrents and clambered back on to the broken road, I felt that we had been lucky. I did not yet guess what lay ahead.

From Torkham to Jallalabad the road runs through a

broad corridor between two parallel snow-capped ranges, the Safed Koh on the south and the Hindu Kush on the north. Beyond Jallalabad this corridor splits into the two valleys of the Kabul River and its right-bank tributary the Surkhab. A prudent road steers clear of the Kabul River's gorges. Even the modern road is prudent enough to prefer the Khyber hump to the Warsak slot—and anyway, since the completion of the Warsak dam, this particular gorge has been filled to the brim by the waters of a reservoir, leaving no room at all for a road to find a passage between lake-edge and mountain-side. Above Jallalabad the ancient road prudently chose to give the Kabul River the widest possible berth, though it was heading for a city through which the Kabul River flows and from which it takes its name. The ancient road swerved away up the Surkhab valley, making for the Khurd Kabul pass; and here, at Nimla, the Mughals had an imperial garden where they camped when they were travelling to Kabul from Delhi at a leisurely bullocks' and elephants' pace. The modern road rashly chooses to hug the right bank of the Kabul River all the way up to Kabul city; and, immediately above the confluence of the Kabul River with the Surkhab, a short stretch of gorge, taking road and river by the throat, gives a foretaste of what lies ahead. Then the valley opens out again and, as quickly, contracts into another gorge that seemed interminable on Wednesday the 20th April, 1960.

If you have seen the Niagara River below the Falls, reduce its width, in your imagination, to a third, or even a quarter, of the American river's breadth, but detract nothing from its furious surge. That will give you a picture of this stretch of the Kabul River as I saw it. The Kabul River, too, was furious today at being denied the room that it needed for discharging its swollen waters, and it was venting its rage both visibly and audibly. The sound of its roar was intimidating, but the sight of its waves was really terrifying—especially those topmost waves that were lashing back up-stream, Niagara-fashion, because they must keep moving at high speed in some direction and were being denied their due passage forward by a layer of still more powerful waves beneath.



Between them, these forward and backward breakers were taking semi-circular bites out of the riverside road up which we were travelling. Surrounding lines of heaped-up stones, promptly placed in position by a fatherly Public Works Department, demarcated the frontier between a safe passage and a certain death in the boiling waters a few feet away to our right. The build of our lorry was rather lavishly broad. Between the warning semicircles of stones and the menacing mountain-side, would there be room for our wheels to squeeze through? This exercise reminded me of the performance of the Royal Horse Artillery at the Military Tournament. I had found this thrilling when I was a child; but then I had been merely a spectator. Today I was a passenger with my own life at stake in the hazard. Today, too, the mountain, as well as the river, was threatening to deny us a passage. While the river was taking bites out of the road on the right-hand side, the mountain, which was made of crumbly stuff, was pouring avalanches of disintegrating conglomerate down upon us from the left. Fortunately, an army of road-menders was busily bulldozing these heaps of rubble into the gaps in the road that had been torn by the rage of the river. To judge by their Mongoloid countenances, half the male population of the Hazarajat must have been mobilized for this perilous job. The Director of Public Works himself was on the scene, in charge of operations. When I peered down below our right-hand wheels as we rounded a particularly large bite, it made me shudder to see these fearless men plying their shovels, beneath a parapet suspended in mid air, almost on a level with the vindictive waters. Yet, as far as I know, no lives of either road-workers or travellers had been lost by the time when, at long last, we emerged from the upper end of the gorge at the Sarobi barrage.

Not content with its mad escapade between Jallalabad and Sarobi, the modern road, on its way Kabul-wards, continues to hug the river, above Sarobi, along the Tang-i-Garú. But, on this final section on this particular day, Nature had temporarily recaptured the initiative from Man. A row of warning stones—this time stretching right across the road—

signalled to us that, up there, the river had left not even as much as a needle's eye for a camel to thread its way through. So here we swerved away leftwards, heading for the Lataband Pass. Our first stage was up a gently rising side-valley; but soon we were zigzagging over a mountain-range on our right; and, as the Sun was setting, we re-entered the Kabul River valley at a high altitude, with the Tang-i-Garú gorge hidden in the depths below us and the snow-capped Hindu Kush facing us, in its full glory, from far away above the valleys of Nuristan. We had evaded the menace of the boiling river, but not the menace of the crumbling mountain. Its decomposing flanks dropped down precipitously below our right-hand wheels; and this stage of the journey became cosier after nightfall. In the darkness our indomitable lorry twisted and turned and reared up and plunged down. In the sections along which the road had been temporarily annihilated by torrents that ought not to have been there, our skilful driver picked his way across flood-waters and over boulders; but now the kindly darkness veiled from me and my fellow-passengers the hazard that the driver was braving.

At Jallalabad we had been sweating in our shirt-sleeves. By the time we had climbed half-way up the Lataband Pass, we had added successive layers of clothing. Jumpers, coats, overcoats: we now needed them all. Yet, in spite of the cold, our radiator kept on boiling, as a protest against the lorry's cruel exertions; and, while we waited for it to cool down, we admired the hardiness of the migrating nomads who had pitched their flimsy tents up here and were quietly preparing to spend the night on the mountain-side, in the midst of their flocks and herds.

Hours passed while we floundered on, till suddenly the driver shouted: 'The lights of Kabul!' There they were, twinkling apparently just below our front wheels. But more hours passed while the lights fitfully disappeared and reappeared and disappeared again. At last I found myself passing, in a daze, through a gateway with an unmistakable lion and unicorn rampant above it. Kind hands extricated me from the lorry, raised a whiskey-and-soda to my lips, and



then put me to bed with a hot-water-bottle, log-fire, and paraffin-stove. I had arrived in arctic Kabul. It seemed a long, long way from torrid Rajasthan. Only the voice of the hoopoo was still the same. 'Pooh-pooh-pooh, pooh-pooh-pooh', he flutes both there and here.

## 16. The Paropanisadae

I WAS standing on a terrace at Istâlif, looking out north-eastwards over the Koh-i-Daman plain. The northern horizon was barred by the snow-crowned wall of the Hindu Kush—not quite so lofty here, perhaps, as farther east above Nuristan, yet lofty enough to be an obstacle even for an eagle, if the range's ancient name is something more than a poetic hyperbole. The graecised version of this ancient name is Paropanisus, and the original word is said to mean, in the Iranian language of the Avesta, a mountain loftier than the ceiling of even an eagle's flight. There it now was, the Paropanisus, barring the horizon from east to west. And down here, in the middle distance, this isolated miniature mountain, rising abruptly out of the Koh-i-Daman plain, gives me the bearings of the invisible point where the Ghorband and Panjshir rivers meet. Either river leads up to a pass, practicable for men and donkeys, over the eagle-baffling Paropanisus. So the point where the two rivers meet was always supremely important until the recent rise to prominence of the city of Kabul deflected the lines of communication from their natural courses. For at least fourteen hundred years running from the sixth century B.C., the strategic and political centre of this part of the world was not Kabul; it was a pair of cities bestriding the confluence of the Ghorband and Panjshir rivers just to the north-west of that miniature mountain down there in the plain. Darius calls this pair of cities Kapisha-Kanish. Today, the deserted site is known as Begram. The double city attained its political zenith in the

first and second centuries of the Christian Era, when it was one of the capitals of an empire stretching from the Oxus to the Jumna. The builders of this empire were the Kushans, ex-nomadic immigrants from Central Asia. Under the aegis of the Kushan Empire, Buddhism made its passage of the Paropanisus in the course of its long roundabout trek from India through Central Asia to China. But the imperial Kushans were heirs of imperial Greeks. And, as I stood on that terrace at Istâlif and feasted my eyes on that magnificent landscape of plain and mountain, my mind was running on the exploits of Alexander and Demetrius and Hermaeus.

When the Greeks reached the land of the Paropanisadae after crossing South-West Asia from the Dardanelles, they felt at home again here for the first time. This mountain-girt plain reminded them of their own Eordaea or Thessaly, and the vineyards convinced them that their own god Dionysus must have forestalled Alexander's conquests. This land of the Paropanisadae must be Dionysus's legendary land of Nysa. The god had made it his own; and his latter-day Greek worshippers joyfully took their cue from him. Alexander planted a Greek colony at Begrâm, and, in the first century of the Christian Era, a Greek prince, Hermaeus, was still ruling here after Greek rule had evaporated everywhere else. Hermaeus is said to have fraternised with the Kushans from the other side of the mountain-wall. No doubt, his power was a puny one compared to theirs. But he did still hold the key to the passage from Central Asia to India, so his good will still had an appreciable value for his Kushan heirs. The Kushans, like the Romans, were Philhellenes; and on the banks of the Jumna and the Oxus, as well as round the shores of the Mediterranean, Greek culture, fostered by a non-Greek but Philhellene regime, long survived the extinction of Greek rule.

Musing on the terrace at Istâlif, I thought of Alexander crossing the Hindu Kush from the Koh-i-Daman plain to invade Bactria from the south. I thought of Demetrius, the later Greek king of Bactria, crossing the same mountain-wall from north to south, a century and a half later, on his





II. GHAZNI AND THE GHAZNAVID MINARETS

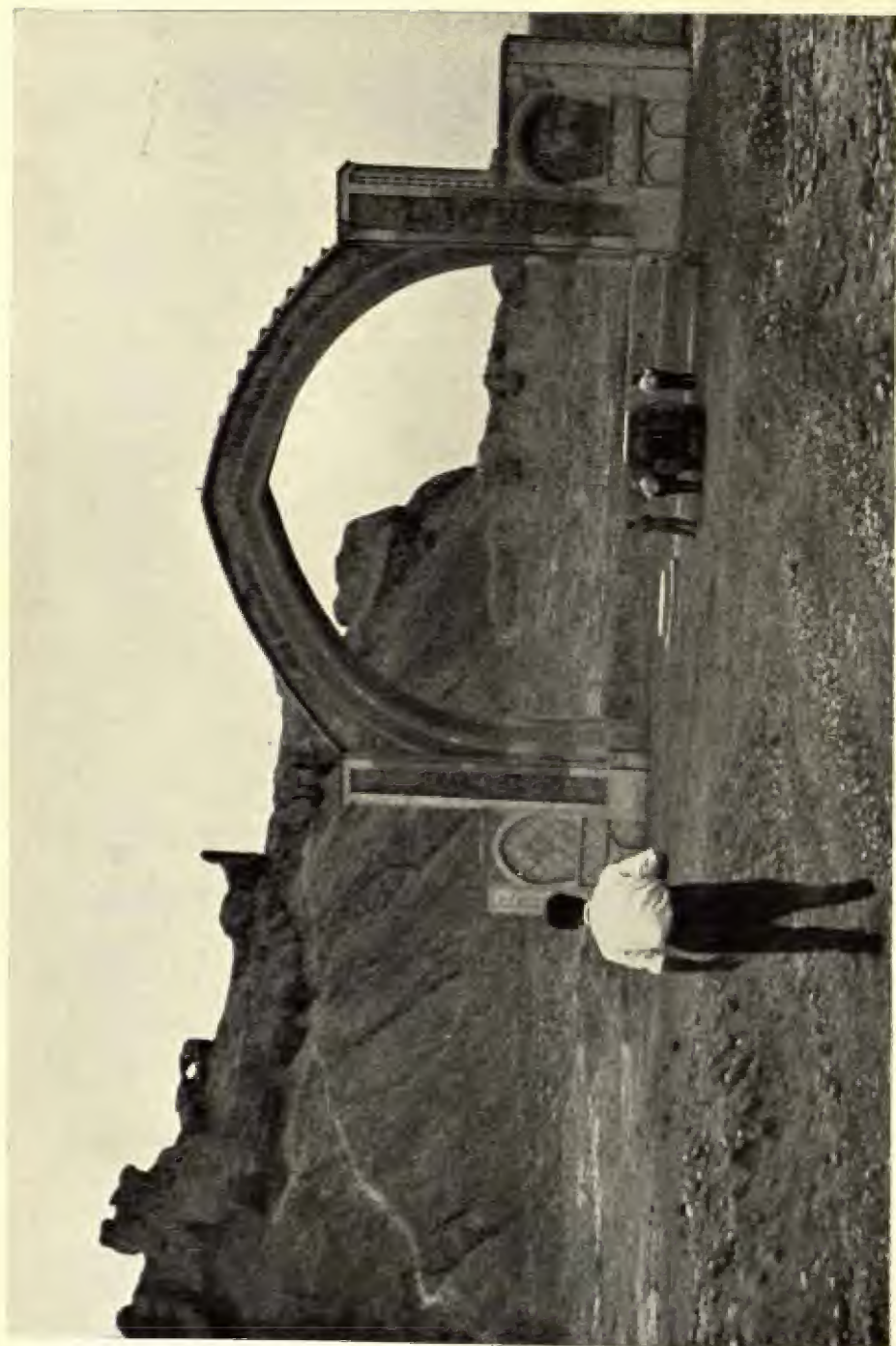


III. TOWARDS QANDAHAR FROM BABA WALI





IV. THE ARGHANDAB RIVER FROM BABA WALI





way to invade India. Demetrius and his successors carried Greek arms and Greek coinages into India farther afield, and with more lasting effects, than Alexander in his ephemeral raid into the western fringe of the huge Sub-continent. The lovely coins of the Bactrian Greek conquerors of India and the Hellenising art of the Bactrian Greeks' Kushan successors testify to the vitality of Greek culture in this far-away land of the Paropanisadae and in the still more remote land of Gandhara, where the Kabul River loses itself in the mightier Indus. For fifty years past, I had been studying this chapter of the World's history in books and on maps. Here, at Istâlif, I had been able to take it all in at a glance; and that one glance had told me more than my fifty-years' book-work had.

## 17. The Arachosian Corridor

BETWEEN Indus, Oxus, and Tigris, the great Iranian plateau stands up like a gigantic fortress, with mountain-ranges serving as its encompassing curtain-walls, and with the super-highlands of Afghanistan, at its north-eastern corner, providing it with an almost impregnable citadel. In such a natural fastness as this, natural corridors for traffic are rare. But there is one that curves south-westwards all the way from the Koh-i-Daman to Qandahar, and another that runs south and north from the Hamun-i-Helmand through Herat to the great plains of the Oxus-Jaxartes basin. In deference to an unusually heavy bout of April rains, we had decided to make our circular tour of Afghanistan in a clockwise direction, in order to give the country's mountain backbone time to dry out before attempting to cross it. So we started by travelling down the Arachosian corridor with the intention of travelling on up the Herati one.

Both corridors have, throughout the ages, been inevitable highways for the movements of conquering armies, migrating

nomads, and proselytising religions. In the Arachosian corridor my mind's ear caught echoes of the beat of galloping horse-hooves reverberating from the mountains. I was back, in my imagination, in the eventful year in which Cyrus's over-extended empire broke into fragments and was welded together again by Darius's masterly hammer-strokes. In this year of decision the Arachosian corridor was the scene of a duel between Vivana the governor of Arachosia, who had taken Darius's side, and Vahyazdata, one of the rival claimants to the Persian crown. Vahyazdata had made himself king in Fars itself, which was the Persian Empire's heartland, and now he sent an army racing up the corridor to crush Vivana and seize Kapisha-Kanish (Begrām), the southern key to the passes over the Hindu Kush. If Vahyazdata's grand strategy had been successful, the whole south-eastern quarter of the Empire would have fallen into his hands. But Vivana saved the situation for Darius at the last ditch. He checked the enemy force's advance under the walls of the key-fortress that was its objective, and then defeated a second attack. After that the tide turned and the fighting surged down the corridor again till Vahyazdata's expeditionary force was overtaken and destroyed. These were three decisive battles in a thirteen-months' war for the dominion over South-Western Asia.

If I had switched my thoughts nearer to the present by thirteen or fourteen hundred years, my mind might have dwelled on the advance of Islam, up the corridor, through Ghazni and Kabul to the passes leading over the Hindu Kush into the Oxus basin, where Islam had already established itself two hundred years earlier. When Islam had thus joined hands with Islam across those higher-than-eagle's-flight mountains, it had encircled the highlands between the Koh-i-Daman plain and the vale of Herat; and it was then only a matter of time before the coralled Ghorī highlanders would be converted from obstinate adversaries of Islam into energetic champions and propagators of it.

Ghazni lies higher than Kabul, and the passes leading from the Kabul River basin into the Helmand River basin stand



higher still. Yet, on the present-day road through Warsak, the watershed is so undramatic that, before we realized that we had reached it, we had left it behind us and had dipped down towards Ghazni on the Helmand basin side. The present-day citadel and walled city of Ghazni occupy a unique strategic position. Planted on the last spur of a south-westward-pointing mountain-range, they command the south-western exits of two alternative routes which skirt this range on either side. The present-day road follows the more north-westerly route; but the sites of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni's minarets and city and palace and tomb indicate that the other route was the main thoroughfare in his day. South-west of Ghazni, at the foot of the present walled city, the two routes rejoin each other, and the road travels on across the pit of a vast natural theatre, walled in by the mountains of the Hazarajat on the north-west and the Sulciman Range on the south-east. In April, both ranges were still under snow, and these gleaming white boundaries of the horizon afforded a dramatic contrast to the featureless open plain under our wheels. But before we reached Mukur the plain had contracted again into a corridor, with mountains running parallel to the road on either hand.

This section of the corridor is the valley of the Tarnak River. The south-westward traveller on wheels enters this valley before reaching Mukur, and he does not swerve away from it till he is almost within sight of Qandahar. He follows it, in fact, over a distance that makes a whole day's journey in a land-rover along a road on which the bridges and culverts have been washed out. The Tarnak is an insignificant stream. Even after this year's exceptionally heavy April rains, it had no water to spare for irrigating more than an occasional wheat-field on its bottom-lands. But, as a golden thread indicating a thoroughfare, it has two signal merits that its nobler sisters lack. It has cut no gorges, and its headwaters rise on such flat and open ground that the traveller cannot tell when he is passing into the Tarnak's domain out of the Ghazni River's. There is no visible watershed between the two. It is this featurelessness that has made the Tarnak

River's fortune. The Ghazni river sheers off southwards to wallow in the Ab-i-Istadé ('the Stagnant Waters') and eventually pour its remaining waters into the Helmand by a devious course, as a tributary of a tributary. As for the mighty Helmand itself, and its lovely main tributary the Arghandab, they are more generous than the Tarnak as irrigators but not so good for serving as highways. Just because they bring down such an abundance of waters, they provide no thoroughfare for wheels. Bipeds and quadrupeds can follow the valley of the Arghandab up the greater part of its course, and can then cross a pass into the upper Tarnak valley. But ascend the course of the Helmand towards its upper reaches, and you will find yourself in a blind alley, blocked by the highest of the high mountains of the Hazarajat. Ascend the insignificant Tarnak and it will bring you to Ghazni; and Ghazni is the gateway to Kabul and to Kapisha-Kanish and to Bactria. As a thoroughfare for wheels, the humble Tarnak has no peer among all the other waters of the Helmand basin.

## 18. A Human Watershed

WATER and mercury are not the only things that flow. A flock of sheep flows, and so does a troop of nomads. All through the month of March, the Pashtun nomads (known as Powindah east of the Khyber and as Kuchi on the other side of the pass) had been flowing, salmon-wise, on a rising gradient, past the campus of the University of Peshawar. They had been flowing northwestward to the highlands of Afghanistan from the plains of Pakistan and India. Today, on the road from Mukur to Qandahar, I met other parties of them. This time too, they were flowing uphill, but now they were moving from south-west to north-east. Between the Khyber Pass and the Arachosian corridor I had crossed the nomad current's watershed. Both from south-west and from



south-east the nomads were converging on their summer pastures in the high mountains of the Hazarajat.

One party that we passed today was so numerous, counting in the animals as well as their human companions, that we had to halt our cars to let the throng pass. The animals have to be counted in, not just because it is they that take up most of the room, but because they are full members of the family. Indeed, their human kinsmen treat them more tenderly than they treat themselves. Even when it is snowing, and the ground is sodden, many of the human tribesmen go barefoot, and all of them sleep in tents that let in the wind and the sleet. When the caravan is on the march, few of the human travellers are mounted. In this particular party my eye was caught by one little boy riding, with a grave countenance, on a donkey. Baby camels riding in paniers slung on either side of a grown-up camel's back are a more frequent sight. A young camel of walking age wears a quilted coat, with a hole cut in it to let his tufted hump poke through. Even grown-up camels have coats of sackcloth issued to them when they reach the higher altitudes. As for kids and lambs, they are carried, like human infants, in human arms. This party was large enough to have an itinerant maula of its own. He was travelling on foot, carrying a kid. A grey-beard was carrying two kids. The grown-up sheep were being allowed to walk. Their mincing feet made a quaint pattering sound on the half-dried mud.

Suddenly, in a group of children, I became aware of one of my granddaughters. She was looking at me intently, as if she were surprised that I had been so slow in recognizing her. Stature, features, eyes, expression: all were the same. Bleach this Pashtun girl a little, or tan that English one, and they would be identical twins. Their identity was a living demonstration of the unity of the human race, in spite of its artificial self-disruption into *soi-disant* separate peoples. The labels 'Pashtun', 'English', and the rest, that we affix to ourselves and to our neighbours, 'are merely conventional signs', as the Bellman's crew would reply.

How long ago did these gypsy Pashtuns' forefathers find

their way over the Hindu Kush into their present haunts south of the mountains? We may guess that the present-day Pashtuns are descended from successive hordes of invaders who, each in turn, adopted the Pashtu language and, with it, the local form of the nomadic way of life. Were the newcomers pushed by pursuers from behind or lured by new pastures opening out in front of them? Certainly, from time to time, the pressure of nomad population—human and animal—in the heart of the Great Eurasian Steppe has pushed weaker hordes outwards into the steppe's fringes and beyond them. But, even without being driven from behind, a nomad horde might be tempted voluntarily to exchange the steppe for the chain of mountain-ringed pastures that links the basin of the Oxus with the basin of the Helmand.

In the course of my present clockwise journey round Afghanistan, I have followed this chain in the reverse direction to the Central Asian nomad migrants' south-eastward trek. After crossing the pastureless gravel desert between Girishk, on the Helmand River, and Dilaram, we travelled, between Dilaram and Farah, through a series of half-a-dozen green amphitheatres, encircled by the southernmost tentacles of the mountains of Ghor. At the beginning of May, these pasture-bowls were full of browsing camels, sheep, and goats, with their human owners—or servants—in attendance. After crossing the open plain of Farah and entangling ourselves in the mountains again, we soon found ourselves traversing the vaster green amphitheatre of Shin Dand (its Persian name, Sabzawar, means 'Green Water-meadows'). Here, in all directions, the mountains recede to the horizon. Their distant blue sky-lines give no hint of the snow-bound highlands lying in ambush to the east of them. Travelling anti-clockwise, in the tracks of the party of migratory Pashtuns that we had encountered a few days earlier between Qandahar and Mukur, a Central Asian nomad horde could find almost continuous inviting pasture for its flocks all the way southward and eastward from the lower valley of the Hari Rud.

This was the road that was followed by the Sakas in the



second century B.C. when, under pressure from the Yüechi, they abandoned their ancestral camping-grounds in the basin of the Jaxartes and the Oxus and set out on a trek that was eventually to carry them, through the Helmand basin, as far south-east as Maharashtra. That morning, on the road from Mukur to Qandahar, I had seen a living replica of a Völkerwanderung that had changed the course of history twenty-one centuries ago.

## 19. Qandahar

A TRAVELLER who enters present-day Qandahar by the road along the Arachosian corridor from Ghazni and Mukur will arrive without having discovered why this famous city stands where it does. A few miles short of the airport, the road sheers away from the right bank of the Tarnak River, which it has been hugging for the greater part of the day. It mounts here on to a broad cultivated plain, and soon it crosses an imposing irrigation canal coming down from the opposite quarter to the Tarnak valley, which has now dropped out of sight. This canal must be fed by some ampler river than the beggarly Tarnak, but no river is now in view on that side either. The horizon on the right is bounded by a low range of mountains with a fantastically jagged crest. In front, one or two isolated mountains, equally low but even more fantastically shaped, jut up out of the plain abruptly. The road is apparently heading for these, but, before it has come within hail of them, the view is cut off by a provoking screen of trees. The road runs into the city along a leafy avenue flanked by gardens, and the traveller has lost all sense of direction by the time when he alights at his lodgings.

To re-orient himself, he must travel on, and out of the city again, along the road leading from Qandahar towards Girishk. On this road, a mile or two beyond the present-day city's edge, he will find himself skirting the foot of one of

those fantastic little isolated mountains that he saw in the distance, and then lost sight of, when he was approaching Qandahar from the Ghazni side. This mountain is shaped like a late-nineteenth-century iron-clad war-ship, with its prow sharpened into a ram. The sharp point of the ram touches the road, and, up the ram's razor-edge, the Mughal Emperor Babur has cut forty giant steps—the Chihil Zina. These steps lead up to a niche in which the emperor has inscribed a record of his conquests in India. Babur's grandson Akbar has added an inscription of his own. The late Ex-King Amanullah of Afghanistan (God bless him for this) has added, for his part, a pair of iron hand-rails between which the sight-seer can climb the steps without any risk of losing his life, though still with a certainty that he will lose his breath.

Standing on the nick in the mountain's prow which Babur has cut at the top of his steps, the traveller gains the panoramic view that eluded him on the road in from Ghazni. Looking back north-eastward, he can now survey the whole extent of the irrigated plain. The mass of trees in the middle distance shows him the site of the present-day town; and, side by side with it, he can also make out the outline of its predecessor. This is the four-square walled city that was laid out in the plain by Ahmad Shah Abdâli, the eighteenth-century founder of the Kingdom of Afghanistan. The dome of Ahmad Shah's tomb marks his city's north-eastern limit. The present-day town-planners have been demolishing Ahmad Shah's city-walls. One hardly notices the remnants of them as one enters Qandahar today along what was once the outer face of one side of Ahmad Shah's quadrilateral. But, from the top of the Chihil Zina, one can see that eighteenth-century Qandahar was laid out on the same rectangular plan as eighteenth-century Jaipur in distant Rajasthan. In Asia this precise civic geometry seems exotic. One might have fancied that it was the work of some Greek architect who had been commissioned by Alexander the Great.

Ahmad Shah's rectangular Qandahar, down there in the





VI, LASHKARI BAZAR AND THE HELMAND RIVER





plain, had supplanted a predecessor before it suffered the same fate in our time. Craning my neck out from the little platform at the top of Babur's Forty Steps, and peering to the right along the ship-shaped mountain's gunwale, I could see, nestling up against the mountain's stern, the decaying mud ramparts of a third city; and this must have been the site of Qandahar before Ahmad Shah Abdāli moved his capital out into the open plain. Ruling, as he did, all that lies between Mashhad and Lahore, Ahmad Shah could afford to plant his new city in an exposed position. The older city had clung to the shelter of the mountain, and at the same time it was well placed for commanding the westward road between the far end of the mountain and the Tarnak River. From my perch at the top of the Forty Steps, I could see the Tarnak again. The space between river and mountain was narrow enough for the city at the mountain's foot to be able to control the passage.

Scrambling down the Forty Steps, back to plain level, we visited the ancient mud-walled city that had come into view from up aloft. The road is passable for wheels, thanks to the presence, within the abandoned city's precincts, of a famous shrine that attracts bus-loads of pilgrims. On the Forty Steps side of the ramparts, just outside them, a spring rises at the foot of the mountain and flings out a ribbon of green sedge along the floor of a miniature valley. Inside the walls, the ruins of a citadel crown a tell which must have taken many centuries to accumulate. The city's ramparts turn from mud to stone as they run up the precipitous mountain-side. Above the highest-perched tower, the defence of the city has been left to Nature. Even a goat would find those precipices too steep to scale.

The height of the citadel-mound bears witness to the antiquity of the earliest of the three Qandahars, and therefore, indirectly, to the antiquity of the road between the stern end of the mountain and the Tarnak River. But there is also a monument that guarantees the antiquity of the route, skirting the mountain's prow, which is followed by the present-day road from Qandahar to Girishk. Overlooking the road

from the lowest slope of the mountain's north-eastward-facing flank, an inscription of the Indian Emperor Ashoka's was discovered only the other day. It is a bilingual inscription, written in Aramaic, the official language of the liquidated Persian Empire, and in Greek, the official language of the Seleucid Monarchy, which was the Persian Empire's easternmost Greek successor-state. This is the westernmost inscription of Ashoka's that has yet been discovered; and its site gives evidence that the whole of Arachosia must have been included in the territory that was ceded to Ashoka's grandfather Chandragupta by Alexander's successor Seleucus 'the Victor'. (It was ceded in exchange for a gift of 500 war-elephants that helped to turn the scale in Seleucus's favour in his struggle with his rival Antigonos.)

By the time when one has seen the panorama from the top of the Forty Steps, has visited the oldest of the three successive Qandahars, and has marked the approximate site of Ashoka's inscription (now re-interred as a precaution against possible vandalism), the question why Qandahar stands where it does has begun to find its answer. Yet, even from the magnificent observation-post at the top of the Forty Steps, one feature revealed by the map still eludes the eye of an observer of the landscape. The map shows, at a glance, that the Helmand, like the Indus, has a tributary panjab, and that Qandahar stands in a posture corresponding to Multan's. It stands in the middle of an inverted delta, just above the meeting-points of the five tributaries on their way to join the sovereign river. Presumably the map does not seriously misrepresent the truth. Yet, from the top of the Forty Steps, only one of Qandahar's attendant rivers is visible—and that one the Tarnak, which is the most insignificant of them all. The queen of them must be the Arghandab; for all the other four yield up their waters to her for her to offer to the Helmand as her own. From the top of the Forty Steps, however, the Arghandab is no more visible than she is from the level of the plain. Up here, too, just as down there, the north-western horizon is bounded by that chain of fantastically jagged little mountains.



That same afternoon, we broke through this persistent obstacle to our vision. We headed straight for the provoking little mountain range, made another crossing of yesterday's imposing irrigation canal, and caught this in the act of coming out of the mouth of a tunnel through the mountain, at the moment before we ourselves shot through one of those unaccountable darbands—capricious breaks in a mountain-wall—that are so characteristic a feature of the Iranian landscape. Shooting through, we turned the corner of another quaintly ruckled mountain, and there, at last, was the valley of the Arghandab spread out before our eyes. It is a lovely valley, all green. The bright green of its cornfields is embroidered with the darker green of its orchards and groves. And through it all the Arghandab flows gracefully in sinuous ribbons of blue water between sinuous bands of yellow sand.

The Arghandab is an adorable river, and we sat gazing at her for hours from the terrace at Baba Wali. A man can fall in love with a river. But if Arghandab had ever figured in a Greek fairy-story as a water-nymph, the story would have told that she had no use for human lovers because her heart was wholly given to her true mate Etymandus (as the Greeks hellenised the name of the Iranian Helmand). At Baba Wali we watched Etymandus's nymph hurrying past us to join him. At Qala-i-Bisht, next day, I saw her throwing herself into his strong arms. Did she notice, as she danced along, that some ruthless human engineers had bled her, to give a transfusion of her life-blood to the thirsty plain of Qandahar? I fancy that her mind was so fully preoccupied with thoughts of Etymandus that she overlooked the liberty that was being taken with her without her leave. Only the thirsty plain was blessing the impious engineers for their audacious act, as the stolen waters clothed the plain's nakedness in a mantle of green.

## 20. Maiwand

SPEEDING, this time, past Babur's rock-cut Forty Steps, and pausing for a moment to pay our respects at Mir Wais's tomb, we crossed the lovely Arghandab over Dr Lali's workmanlike bridge and soon sheered away from the river's green skirts into a half-green desert—half-green only, yet still green enough to provide attractive pasture for browsing herds of camels and sheep. We ran on till we crossed a dry torrent-bed and entered the village of Kushk-i-Nakhud. We were bound for Lashkargah, in the angle above the Arghandab's confluence with the Helmand. But we had time to spare, on our way, for an excursion to the battlefield of Maiwand, where an Afghan army of liberation had taken a British expeditionary force by surprise, and had gained an unquestionable victory over it, on the 27th July, 1880.

We knew the general direction in which the battlefield lay. The commander of the British army of occupation in Qandahar had had news that an Afghan force was bearing down on Qandahar from Herat, and he had sent out a column to fend it off. The armies had marched towards each other along the shortest route between the two cities—a route threading through the south-westernmost foothills of the mountains of the Hazarajat. Such tracks are practicable for infantry and cavalry, and even for horse-drawn artillery. They hold terrors only for present-day mechanised wheels.

Though the British knew that the Afghans were on the march, they did not know that they had come so far till they learnt it by running into them. They were not only outnumbered; they were also outgunned. The consequence was a British defeat. Roberts then averted a disaster for British arms by his famous march to Qandahar from Kabul. Yet, though the reverse at Maiwand was thus partially retrieved, the experience was, no doubt, one of the considerations that moved the British to extricate themselves from Afghanistan, on this occasion, just in time. The second British invasion of



Afghanistan had been almost as wanton as the first. But, this time, the invaders eluded the nemesis that had overtaken them in the first of these two wars of aggression. For this they had, in part, to thank the Afghans. At Maiwand the Afghans had taught them a lesson. The British, on their side, can claim credit for having taken this lesson to heart.

We knew that we had to look for Maiwand battlefield somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Kushk-i-Nakhud torrent bed, near the point where this broke out from the hills. A good-natured policeman came with us and guided us to the spot. This particular country road happened to be as good as some of the main roads of Afghanistan; and, within ten or twelve miles of Kushk-i-Nakhud, the Afghan victory memorial came into view. It stands in a walled garden overlooking the cemetery in which the Afghan dead are buried. These can fairly claim to have died as martyrs for their faith. The defeated British force had been compelled to retreat to Qandahar, leaving Maiwand battlefield in the Afghan victors' hands. So the Afghans had buried the British dead as well as their own. They had not only buried them; they had raised a monument for them too. It is a pillar of sun-dried brick, not a stone column like the monument for the Afghan dead, and, by now, it has half weathered away. It is natural that the Afghans should not have commemorated the fallen invaders of their country as durably as they have commemorated the fallen defenders of it. It is noteworthy that they should have honoured the enemy dead at all. They admired their valour and they felt no rancour.

When I was standing in front of this Afghan monument to fallen British soldiers, I felt what I have felt in the presence of German war-graves in countries invaded by the Germans in one or other of the two world wars. These men had given the most that human beings can give: their lives. But what were they doing in a country that was not theirs? Their opponents who fell on their own soil, in the act of defending it, need no justification. Indisputably they died in a good cause. It is a tragedy that any young man's life should be cut short by a violent death at the hands of his fellow men. It is

doubly tragic when he loses his life in serving his country in an aggressive war. At least half of the uncounted millions of war dead who have given their lives since the institution of war came into existence must have died fighting for a bad cause. How much longer is this evil institution going to be treated as if it were not the public crime that it is?

## 21. Lashkari Bazar

THE half-green desert had turned into a bare one. Monotonous gravel stretched away all round us, relieved only by a distant view of receding foothills on our right. Suddenly a competent and purposeful-looking side-road turned off at right-angles on our left. It looked as if it must lead to some other world, and so it did. It led, indeed, to two worlds. They both rose up abruptly out of the desert, one behind the other: in front, an ultra-modern world of workshops and offices; in the background, a vast mud-brick ruin that looked as if it might have been fabricated by a mirage. The ruin was Lashkari Bazar. It was the winter-quarters of the Ghaznavid dynasty. The offices and workshops were those of the Helmand Valley Authority; and this new city, Lashkargah, has adopted the old city's name. This claim to continuity is symbolic; for the Authority's task is to make the valley once more productive and populous. 'Once more': for the valley must have produced crops in abundance in the days when it had to feed, for perhaps six months in the year, the court and army of a prince whose dominions stretched from Khorasan to the Panjab.

In a few minutes we were enjoying our first sight of the mighty River Helmand flowing past below the windows of our lodgings. The river's gait was like that of a mettlesome horse; and, no doubt, he was impatient to meet his destined mate the Arghandab. Their meeting-place was only about ten miles below this point at which he was swirling past us.



Here he was still solitary; yet, alone, he dwarfed the whole troop of five rivers whose waters the Arghandab gathers up as her gift to him. A few yards down stream from our windows the Helmand forked round an island smothered under dense jungle. The Authority had thrown a bridge across the arm of the river between the island and their clubhouse; but the river had swept the presumptuous bridge away. He was determined to keep the jungle safe for his protégés the wild boars. This was a tiny gesture of defiance towards his master, Man. But the gesture was a futile one; for the mettlesome river had already been compelled to wear a man-made bit and bridle. He had been harnessed to serve human purposes that were not his. He had been dealt with, in fact, in the high-handed way in which the Americans deal with Nature. It was an experience that was new to him.

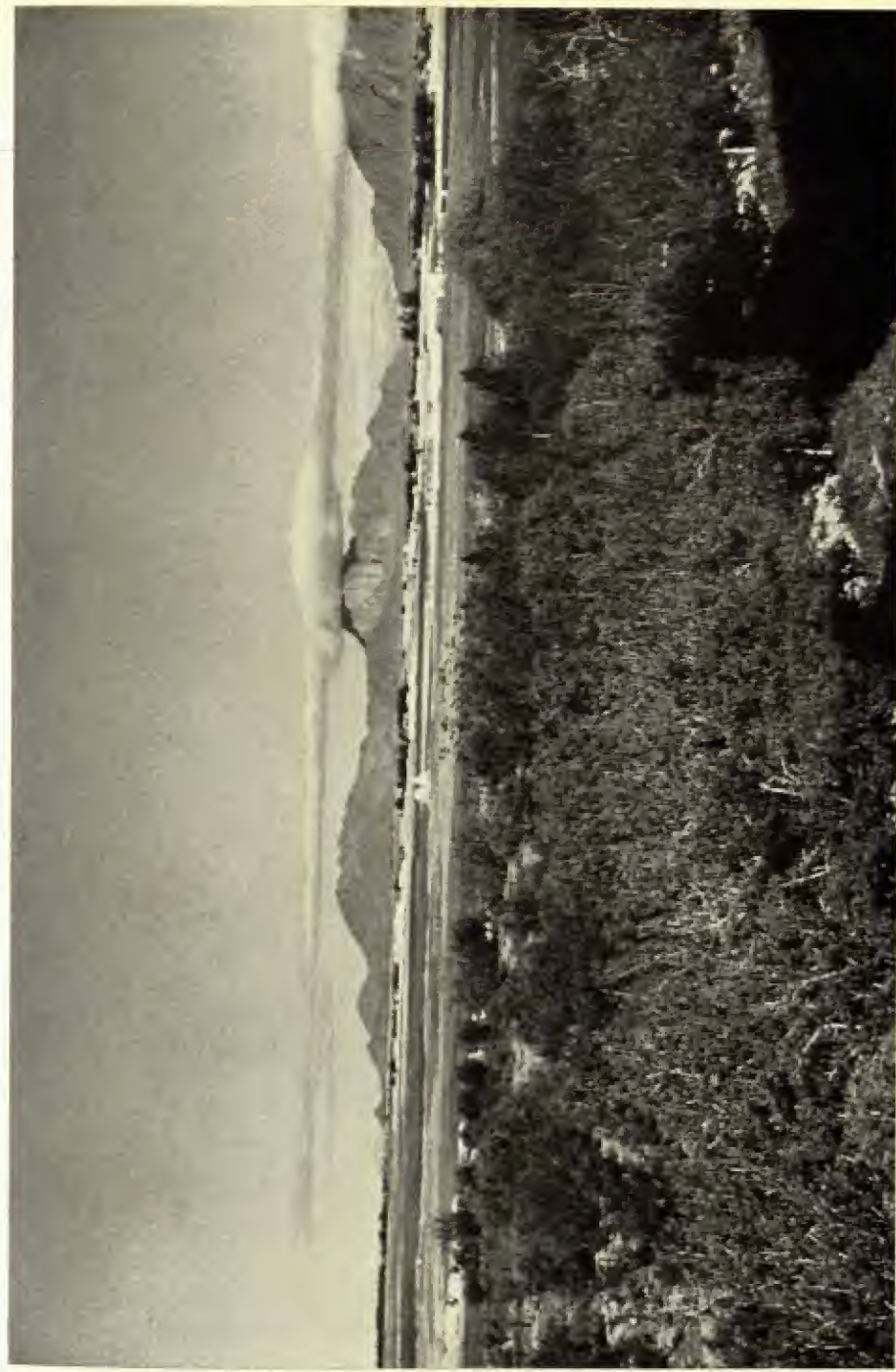
In Afghanistan, down to the recent arrival there of high-powered modern technology, Man's way of getting Nature to meet his needs has been to humour her, not to hit her over the head. In wrestling with her, Man has practised the Chinese, not the Western, boxer's technique. The Pashtun or Türkmen pastoral nomad is content to keep himself and his family and his livestock perpetually on the move in order to keep in step with the changing seasons. He goes to meet Nature; he does not expect Nature to come to meet him. As for the Tajik or Uzbek farmer, he is content to draw off a tiny runnel from the upper waters of some amenable stream. If he can irrigate a few acres, this will suffice him. But the domain of the Helmand Valley Authority has ceased to be a part of traditional Afghanistan. It has become a piece of America inserted into the Afghan landscape. Those two thousand kilometres of straight roads along which a car can race at 50 or 60 miles an hour: the desert that they cut like a knife might be, not Arachosia, but Nevada. And these miles and miles of equally straight canals; the river that they are bleeding might be, not the Helmand, but the Colorado. As for Dr Lali's park of fabulous monsters, I had not seen the like since my glimpse of an outfit that was ploughing a new four-lane highway across the State of Ohio. Put through a

telephone-call to Dr Lali, and he will make a sortie from his camp with the appropriate machines for executing your command. Throw a bridge across the Dilaram River? Tap the Helmand River for a new canal a hundred miles down stream? In a trice this American-minded jinn will be carrying out your exacting orders.

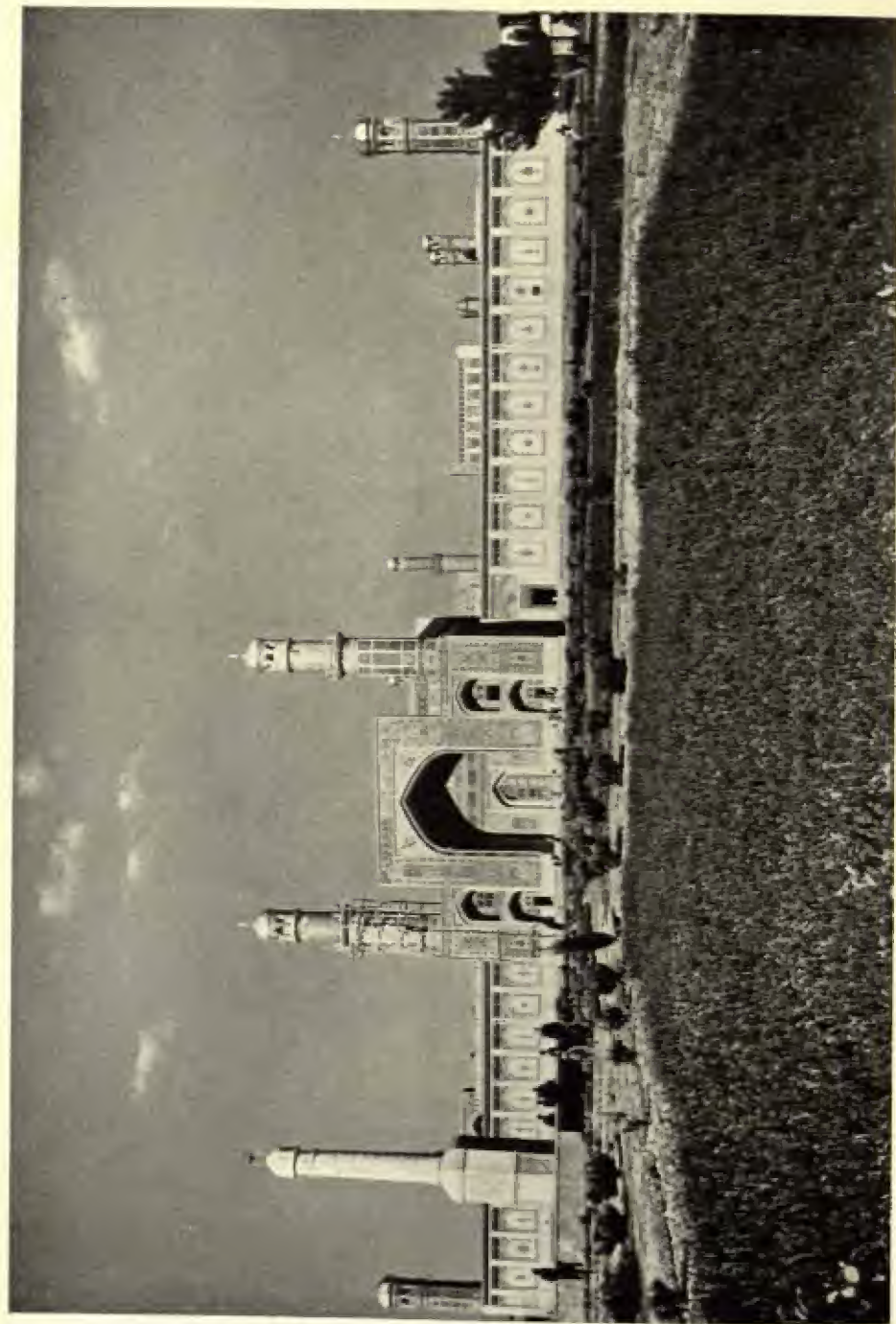
American-mindedness is the characteristic mark of the whole band of Afghan technicians and administrators who are imposing Man's will on the Helmand River. Most of them have lived and worked and studied in the United States; some of them have married American wives; all of them show signs of a certain nostalgia for the American way of life. Coming home to Afghanistan, they have brought America with them. The new world that they are conjuring up out of the desert at the Helmand River's expense is to be an America-in-Asia.

Crossing a bridge over the Helmand which the river has not ventured to molest, we mounted the bluffs on the western side of the valley. We were out of the valley in a minute; for here, at Lashkargah, it is only a few hundred yards broad. Were we being taken on a wild-goose chase? From the brow of the bluff we raced on deeper and deeper into the monotonous gravel desert that we had traversed on our way to Lashkargah from Kushk-i-Nakhud. The desert did not take us by surprise, considering that we were now high above even the peak flood-level of the Helmand at the point where we had crossed it. Could we really be heading for water and verdure and life? And then suddenly we crossed a canal and found ourselves among the broad fields of Nad-i-'Ali. Here, out in the desert, the soil-chemists had discovered a tract of land whose chemical composition was a recipe for fertility if water could be led to it; and the engineers had brought the water by tapping the Helmand far up stream and leading the Bughra canal out into the desert at Nad-i-'Ali's own level. When, next day, we were carried out farther into the desert, along a longer and straighter road, to visit another man-made oasis, Marja, we were confident, this time, that we were not being sent on a fool's errand. Our faith in the





VII. CLOUD EFFECTS AT FARAH



VIII. HERAT: THE CONGREGATIONAL MOSQUE



wonder-working powers of the Afghan-American jinns had been fortified by our previous sight of their works.

Afghan-American technology has worked wonders by its strategy of dealing Nature knock-out blows, but it has not yet reclaimed all the derelict land that was once brought under cultivation by the traditional strategy of coaxing Nature into cooperating with Man. One morning we followed the Helmand down stream for some forty miles beyond the Authority's headquarters. We admired their reclamation-work at Shamalan and Darwishan, and their diversion-dam below a bluff whose perpendicular lines simulate a man-made castle. These living monuments of present-day engineering are impressive. Yet, all along the river's course, they are shadowed—and overshadowed—by the dead monuments of past life. The Authority's outpost at Darwishan is overlooked by a mighty mud-brick fortress. And, gazing down stream from Darwishan before we turned back northward, we could see tells and tells and tells. They ran on and on till they disappeared below the southern horizon. The Authority's ambition is gradually to reclaim the whole of the great southward bend of the Helmand till they run up against the Afghan-Persian frontier that partitions the river's delta. As they advance, will they find, at each stage, that their old-fashioned predecessors have been there before them?

If the whole Helmand valley had been under cultivation, down to the swamp through which its delta drains away into its hamun, the valley's produce would barely have sufficed for supplying a capital on the scale of Ghaznavid Lashkari Bazar. The labyrinth of palaces, courtyards, barracks, and parade-grounds extends for a mile and a quarter continuously, north and south, along the bluffs overhanging the Helmand's east bank; and, when at last you have cleared the southernmost wall, you are not really at the end. From here you still have eight or nine miles more to go before you reach the immense fortress and towering citadel of Qala-i-Bisht, commanding the watersmeet of the Helmand and the Arghandab; and the whole of this extremity of the triangular gravel plateau between the two rivers is dotted with castles

and palaces that would be major monuments if they were not dwarfed by Qala-i-Bisht and Lashkari Bazar.

This concourse of magnificent buildings of the Ghaznavid Age is an archaeologist's paradise. The opening of the Sasanid Age in the third century of the Christian Era had seen the revolutionary curvilinear architecture of arch and dome supplant the immemorially old rectilinear architecture of vertical column, horizontal rafter, and slanting gable. This had been a mighty feat of creative imagination; but it had been only the first experiment in the use of the new style and technique. Eight hundred years later, the Ghaznavid Age saw a second burst of creative imagination, in which many more of the possibilities latent in curvilinear architecture were successfully explored. Lashkari Bazar is one of the chief surviving monuments of this second chapter in the history of the arch and dome; and, even in its present dilapidated state, it still speaks volumes to the expert. I had to take this architectural creativity on trust. Ignorance prevented me from appreciating it for myself. But this ignorance of the technicalities left me all the freer to savour the *mise-en-scène*.

Clambering up ruined stairways into ruined halls, one gains sudden entrancing vistas of the Helmand lapping at the foot of the bluff. Eight centuries must have passed since this Ghaznavid cantonment was abandoned. Yet its brief glory seems to have made an impression on its slave, the river, that has not been effaced by the cantonment's long-drawn-out decay. Contrary to the usual practice of rivers in Afghanistan, the Helmand, in the reach that washes the foot of Lashkari Bazar, has faithfully kept to his old course. He has not undercut the bluff and brought the palace toppling down into his bed. And he has not made nonsense of the Ghaznavid town-planners' choice of site by swerving away from it, as, at Delhi, the Jumna has swerved away from the Mughals' Red Fort. As you stand by the runnel-fed bath round which the King's ladies used to sit and chat in a cosy circle, you can still enjoy the view of the river, hugging the bluff, that those ladies enjoyed eight hundred years ago.



Human skill—even the unobtrusive skill of the Pre-Mechanical Age—can work wonders even with the most unpromising materials. That endless array of brown tells down-river bears witness to the former presence there of green fields. And a surviving patch of irrigation on the gaunt gravel plateau between Lashkari Bazar and Qala-i-Bisht suggests that, in the days when those fortresses were manned and those palaces were inhabited, they, too, may have nestled among acres of orchard and wheat. Yet, when Man, even Americanised Man, has done his utmost to reclaim the desert through which the Helmand cleaves his way, the man-made oases hardly mitigate the desert's grim monotony. What, then, can have induced the Ghaznavids to spend half their time in this bare torrid zone, and to erect buildings here on the scale of what they built at Ghazni itself?

What brought the Ghaznavids to Lashkari Bazar? Not their womenfolk's wish to evade the rigours of the Ghazni winter. The Ghaznavids were not soft, nor were they feminists. It was not their women who brought them to Lashkari Bazar; it was their elephants. A park of war-elephants was just as necessary for the Ghaznavids as Dr Lali's park of bulldozers is for the Helmand Valley Authority. No more elephants, no more victorious campaigns in India. But elephants are fussy and exigent. If you do not provide them with the amenities that they demand, they decline to stay alive. A single winter at Ghazni would have seen the end of the Ghaznavids' elephant-park. So their elephants could make them do what their womenfolk could not. They could make them spend the colder half of the year in the sub-tropical climate of the Lower Helmand valley.

Professor Schlumberger drove this point home for me by reminding me of an historical parallel. 'Do you happen to remember where the Seleucid dynasty kept its elephant-park?' he asked me. 'At Apamea,' I was able to answer. 'I have been there.' 'Well, if you have been there,' Professor Schlumberger went on, 'do you also happen to remember what the Orontes valley is like there?' I remembered that too. I had had plenty of time to take stock of it while our car was

ploughing through the mud along the edge of a valley-bottom that the Orontes, flowing sluggishly through it, has turned into a swamp. This trough is a section of the Great Rift Valley that runs from Turkey to Nyasaland. Apamea is perched, high above the trough's eastern brink, along a ridge of breezy downland. But even in springtime the valley-bottom, below the Greek city, is as stifling as a hot-house. 'Well, that is the kind of place in which elephants feel at home. And the Ghaznavids' elephants at Lashkari Bazar must have felt as much at home there as the Seleucids' elephants felt at Apamea.'

Suitable sites for elephant-parks are rare in both Syria and Afghanistan. And the Seleucids' war-elephants, like the Ghaznavids', were sinews of war in the literal sense. In discussing Ashoka's inscription at Qandahar, I have recalled that the first Seleucus ceded all his provinces west of Qandahar and south of the Hindu Kush to Chandragupta Maurya in exchange for 500 of the Indian emperor's elephants; and the price in terms of ceded territory turned out not to be excessive from Seleucus's point of view. Those 500 elephants were trumps. They won him his victory over his rival Antigonos 'One-Eye'. In fact, they won him his empire. No wonder that he and his successors took trouble to provide their elephants with congenial accommodation. Even after the Romans had routed the Seleucid emperor Antiochus the Great, the Senate could not sleep easy so long as the elephant-park at Apamea remained intact. In the year 161 B.C. some visiting Roman commissioners had the elephants at Apamea ham-strung. One of the commissioners paid for this outrage by being assassinated. But the mischief had been done. Within a year the Seleucids had lost their grip on Media and Babylonia.



## 22. Herat

AFGHANISTAN is rich in historic sites. It would be strange if it were lacking in them, considering that, since the dawn of history, this region has been one of the World's busiest thoroughfares. Kapisha-Kanish, astride the confluence of the Ghorband and Panjshir rivers, was a key-point in the military operations in the momentous year 522 B.C. The caves and colossi at Bamian bear witness that this was a key-point in the passage of Buddhism across the Hindu Kush en route from India to Eastern Asia. Balkh has staked a claim to be 'the Mother of Cities'. But today these three historic sites all lie desolate. Herat is unique among the historic sites of Afghanistan in being still a going concern.

There has not been any break in the continuity of Herat's history. When Chingis Khan swooped down upon the Islamic World, the local rulers of Herat made their submission in time to save their city from the fate that overtook Shahr-i-Golgota, the devastated citadel that looks down on the valley of Bamian. Tamerlane, who dealt Seistan a knock-out blow, did not obliterate Herat. His descendants valued and adorned it. And so, today, Herat is a living witness to the glory of the Islamic World in the days before it fell into adversity. Qandahar, too, is an ancient city, and Qandahar, like Herat, is still alive. But there is a mellowness about Herat which Qandahar has not acquired. Herat, after all, was one of the great cities of Dar-al-Islam in the age of the Caliphate. The classical Arab geographers rate Herat as one of the four local capitals of Khorasan, and their Khorasan included what is now Northern Afghanistan, as well as what is now North-Eastern Persia. Herat's three sister-cities were Nishapur, Merv, and Balkh. I had seen the ruins of Nishapur; I was to see the ruins of Balkh. Merv, on the Soviet side of the Soviet-Afghan border, was, for the moment, beyond my reach. I was eager to see the fourth of Khorasan's

classical capitals—the more so because I knew that Herat was still intact and alive.

As we drove northward across the broad green Shin Dand plain, my curiosity increased. We were approaching the watershed between the Adraskan River, which flows southward to the Hamun-i-Helmand, and the Hari River, in whose valley Herat stands. Yet the plain ran on without giving warning of any approaching mountain-range. At last, reluctantly, the lazy levels began to tilt and the sluggish river began to run. The plain gradually turned into a shallow valley. But we were over the top before we realized it. A trickle of water, running northward alongside of our wheels, was our evidence that the watershed was now behind us. The descending valley soon opened out into a grassy expanse sloping down ever so gently; and, at the point where the valley released us, an avenue of pine trees took us in its arms. Have you ever travelled through an avenue that runs, straight as an arrow, for ten miles? This ten-miles-long avenue might have run on for ever if it had not run up, at last, against the south bank of the Hari Rud. The avenue's evident intention had been to direct us straight across the river, pick us up again on the opposite bank, and escort us from there to our hotel. Fortunately, the river had frustrated the avenue's plan by carrying away the bridge. A leftward diversion took us along the Hari Rud's south bank to another bridge, farther down stream, which the river had spared. This diversion gave us a chance of viewing the Hari Rud at close quarters. He is a noble river, and he and the avenue together give the visitor from the south a worthy introduction to a famous city.

Herat is, indeed, so famous, and its monuments are so well known, that it would be tedious to give yet another description of them in detail. The congregational mosque, the princess Gohar Shad's graceful dome, her mausoleum's two minarets, and the four minarets of the vanished madrasah: there they were in real life, aping the familiar pictures of them. It is not surprising that so mellow a city as Herat should harbour the tombs of famous men. Jami is buried



here. He was the latest of the Persian classical poets. Mir 'Ali Sher Nawai is buried here. He was the first, and perhaps also the last, man of letters to give literary form to the Turki that was his, and his Timurid masters', mother-tongue. Dost Muhammad Khan is buried in the outskirts of the city, within the precincts of the Gazargah. He can contend with 'Abdarrahman Khan for the title to have been the greatest of the amirs of Afghanistan in the perilous nineteenth century, when Afghanistan was a grain of corn caught between a British and a Russian millstone. It is also not surprising that Herat should have revived a fine art that the Timurids nursed and that the Safavids brought to perfection. If you visit the congregational mosque today, you will find the lost tiles being replaced by new tiles that are being made on the spot by artists who have re-acquired the traditional skill. Watch them at work, as they cut the coloured tesserae and fit their jigsaw shapes into an harmonious pattern. Their dexterity is a sight to see.

But the beauty of Herat does not lie in the details, however lovely each of these, singly, may be. It lies in the panorama of the city embowered in its valley. The view across the valley from the south had been half hidden from us by the screen of the ten-miles-long pine-tree avenue. Along the north side of the valley the foothills of the Hindu Kush rise more abruptly than the slope down which we had slid so gradually in our first approach. On the northern foothills we found two admirable observation-points: the shrine of Sayyid 'Abdallah and the Takht-i-Safar. I have lost count of the hours that we spent on the terrace of the Takht-i-Safar, just drinking in the beauty of the scene in the changing light as the Sun went down. We spent hours there on two evenings running, and we could happily have made a life-long habit of this rewarding exercise if an imperious time-table had not plucked us importunately by the sleeve. I had seen other lovely valleys from similar vantage-points: the vale of Sparta from Mistrá; the plain of Brusa from the türbes of the Ottoman sultans; and, just a few days back, the valley of the Arghandab from Baba Wali. But the valley of the Hari Rud

in the neighbourhood of Herat is the loveliest that I have ever seen so far. When one surveys the valley from the Takht-i-Safar, the particular beauties of the city are enhanced by being woven into a larger pattern. What catches and holds the eye is not the loftiness of the minarets and not the grandeur of the silhouettes of the citadel and the congregational mosque. It is the villages that cluster round the city, and the trees that cluster round the villages. The river, which runs so broad when you are close to its banks, is hidden, in this distant view, by the groves and orchards. But, across the valley, the pine-avenue, running, as it does, down an open grassy slope, displays its whole noble length; and its ten miles cast a lengthening shadow eastward as the sun sinks towards Persian Khorasan.

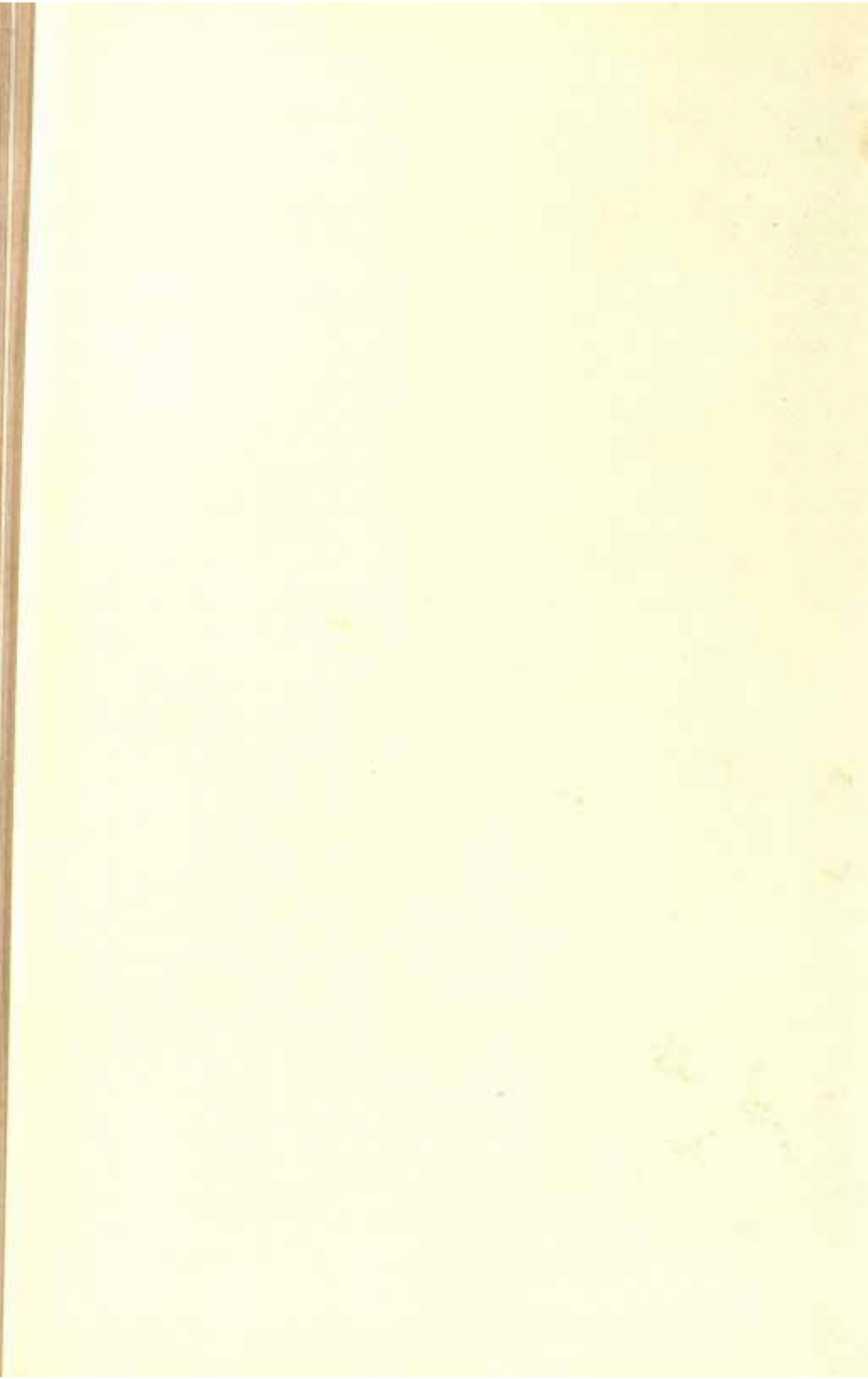
## 23. Crossing the Sabzak Pass

THE approach to Herat from the south is surprisingly easy. The passes, such as they are, are low and gentle, and much of the road runs through open upland plains. The next stage beyond Herat, in our clockwise tour round Afghanistan, was to take us across the section of the Hindu Kush range that bounds the Hari Rud valley on the north. Along this stretch of the chain, the high points rise to a mere 10,000 feet—half the height of the giant snow-mountains, farther east, that crown Nuristan and Chitral. Since altitude is a comparative notion, we had not taken very seriously the task of crossing the western Hindu Kush from Herat to Qala-i-Nau. So when, on the evening of our first day at Herat, the Governor-General considerably let us know that an unusual fall of rain, the day before, had put the road over the Sabzak Pass out of action, we felt some reluctance in accepting his suggestion that we should put off our departure from Herat from the next day to the day after. We made up our minds to push on no later than that, whatever the weather.





IX. HERAT: GOHAR SHAD'S TOMB





If we had called to mind the ethnographical map, we might have taken the Governor-General's kindly warning to heart. The western Hindu Kush may be no more than half the height of the eastern end of the chain. Yet it must present something of an obstacle to human traffic, considering that it has come to be the dividing line between two linguistic worlds. South of this mountain-chain, people speaking Iranian languages—Persian, Pashtu, and Baluchi—extend all the way southward to the shore of the Indian Ocean. North of the chain, Turkish-speaking peoples extend northward almost up to the line of the Trans-Siberian Railway. A chain that sunders Iran from Turan is unlikely to be altogether easy to cross. But we did not think of this when we embarked on this enterprise. ('Embarked' is the right word, since more of our journey than we had bargained for was in the water.)

Leaving Herat by the road running eastward up the Hari Rud valley, we passed the Shehidahi Gardens and then swerved north-east through a gap in the valley's northern foothills. A tributary of the Hari Rud was pouring down through this gap in a rather ominously full spate, and the amount of the water in two side-streams that we soon had to cross gave us an early warning of what was to come. Then the valley broadened out into a rolling plain, gently rising towards the north-east, and the route seemed, after all, to be easy going. Even when the converging mountains cheviéd us into the valley-bottom, the road continued to be good. Our adventures began when we reached the head of the valley and turned northward towards the Sabzak Pass.

As we mounted we ran on to snow, and more snow was falling as we went. The road twisted and turned, and the sky-line beyond each twist looked as if it must be the summit; but, each time, further twists and higher sky-lines opened up beyond; and, at every twist, the depth of the snow on the road increased by an inch or so. A few inches more, and the snow would be too high even for a land-rover's clearance. It had already stopped five lorries. They had been stuck for two days on this side of the pass. Could we squeeze past

them? Yes, they had considerably drawn in to the side of the road.

When at last we crossed the summit, we shouted for joy. This was the highest point on our day's journey: 7950 feet. The worst of our troubles must now be behind us. But we were soon undeceived. Our northward descent towards the Turkish-speaking world was steeper; the snow lay thicker here; and, as we floundered through alternating snow-drifts and mud-wallows, the precipitous side-wall of a cañon opened below our cars' right wheels (cars in the plural: we had been prudent enough to bring a fleet of two). The wallows had evidently been made by lorries in their last agonies. We passed two more, stuck fast, on our way down the northern slope.

When we left the snow behind us, and the sunshine, piercing the ceiling of leaden-coloured cloud, lit up an amphitheatre of green and pink mountains into which we were gently dropping down, we shouted again for joy. The worst of our troubles must now be behind us. But we were soon undeceived. The snow had let go of us, only to land us in the mud. We stuck in this mud on the edge of a bright green Alpine meadow. On the meadow there were eight black tents, with a piebald flock of sheep encamped in front of them. Immediately, men and boys came running to our rescue, armed with spades, while solicitous horsemen galloped up and down the road. (The ever fatherly Governor-General of Herat had sent them instructions by telephone to help us on our way if we ever got that far.) With their help we slid down, along the grass verges of the mud, to cañon-bottom level.

Here lay the first Turkish-speaking village, Laman, and, as we sped through it, we shouted again for joy. The worst of our troubles must now be behind us. But we were soon undeceived. A few yards beyond the village, the road ran through a river in spate. We charged across the flood and hoped for the best, as the road switchbacked over the bluffs on the river's right bank. But now, on the crown of a bluff that the spate was rapidly undercutting, we came upon a



hopelessly foundered lorry. It had been standing there, inextricable, for two days, while the river was nibbling the road away closer and closer to its left wheels. It could only be a matter of days before the road would give way under this unfortunate lorry and would send it toppling leftwards into the river. Meanwhile, was there passage-room for a land-rover between the lorry and the road's fast-crumbling edge? After essaying, we came to the conclusion that to make the attempt would be suicide. The road would collapse under our weight, and we should turn a somersault into the river racing past down there, far below. Was it impossible, then, to go forward? It was certainly impossible to go back. At this supreme crisis of our day's journey, our drivers had an inspiration. Backing up the road, they circumnavigated the immovable lorry by ploughing their way through a field that overhung the road on the side that was safely away from the river. But how were they to get down on to the road again beyond the lorry's bows? Only by diving down a bank at an angle of forty-five degrees—and this bank was intersected by an irrigation-channel with hump-backed brims. The first of our two cars impaled itself on the channel's outer hump. To liberate it, we had to fill the channel with stones and dig the outer hump away.

When both cars had regained the main road along this improvised loop-line, we shouted again for joy. The worst of our troubles must now be behind us. But we were soon undeceived. A temporary tributary of the river had cut away the road and confronted our wheels with a miniature cliff, not much less than three feet high. This proved to be only a minor trouble. With stones and earth we quickly built a ramp up which our cars could climb. We were now within ten miles of our destination, Qala-i-Nau. But those last ten miles were a nightmare. The valley now began to writhe, and, at each writhe, the road ran through the river. Moreover, at every mile, the river was becoming fuller and faster and deeper; for, as it went, it was collecting tributary waters from either side. At the first two fords nothing went amiss; but at the third the second car stuck deep in mid-stream, and the

waters flowed through it for some minutes before it was salvaged by the other car tugging it and a team of villagers pushing it from behind. Would the engine work again after its wetting? At the first try, it gave no sign of life. But our invincible drivers cleaned and dried some of its more tender parts, and—unbelievably—it started up.

These last hours were a continuous series of anxieties. Yet, while waiting, time and again, to discover whether we were going to be defeated, we could not be blind to the beauty of the green hills or to the Turkishness of the kibitkas—so different from the Pashtun nomads' black tents—in which the villagers in the river valley were spending their dank and chilly summer. A fourth, a fifth, a sixth ford crossed our path. We made a safe passage of all of them. Across two of them we were piloted by a troop of three horsemen and a foal. The tiny creature skipped across the flood with ease on his spindly legs. A spate that might have been the death of a land-rover meant nothing to him. No wonder the people of Central Asia continue to put their trust in horses.

A seventh ford, another moment of anxiety for the second car, and we were ambling down an avenue of the tallest and slimmest poplars that I have ever seen. This was Qala-i-Nau. We had reached this day's journey's end. We had covered 103 miles in nine hours. Considering the nature of those miles, our average speed had not been one that we needed to be ashamed of.

## 24. Crossing the Doabi

WE started out early from Qala-i-Nau. There was a point, about a hundred miles ahead of us, where we should come, we had been warned, to a full stop. A river in spate, so it was reported, had carried a bridge away, and the water was running too deep for even a land-rover to have any chance of passing. We wanted to reconnoitre this critical point before dark.



On the first stage of this day's journey it did not look as if we should get within even ninety miles of that formidable river before nightfall. Our road led us into a flat green valley between two lines of rolling green hills. It was an idyllic scene. Across the valley there was an encampment of tents of the four-square pyramidal-topped Central Asian pattern, and flocks and herds were gleefully browsing on the rich pasture. But Nature here was less kind to travellers than to shepherds. This valley was riverless but not waterless, and the road soon liquified into a morass. A panier's load of jagged stones had been scattered here and there over the mud. It was a symbolic gesture, signifying that the Public Works Department was not unaware that this section of the road needed attention. Walking at two miles an hour on the mud-road's sodden turf-marge, we forged ahead of our cars, which were wallowing at six furlongs an hour in the morass. In the drier bits they got even with us by racing at eleven miles an hour. Should we ever even see the impassable river at this rate? On a journey like this the secret of success is never to despair. Just when that mud-road was on the point of defeating us, it reluctantly turned up out of the valley and began to wind its way among the hills; and, from there onwards, the mud patches became the exception instead of the rule.

These Central Asian hills were as green as anything in Ireland. In this month of May, 1960, they could surely have catered for all the flocks and herds in the World. Sheep from New Zealand and cows from the Swiss Alps would have made a good bargain if they could have exchanged their native pastures for this lush green countryside. And these hills of Afghan Turkistan were not only life-giving; they were lovely. Their green flanks were spangled with gentians and tulips. The gentians identified themselves by displaying their own inimitable blue. The tulips were red, and in the lower country, where, in places, their colour dominated the green of the grass and the wheat, English eyes, presented with a coloured photograph of the landscape, would have found it hard to believe that this was not a British Railways advertisement of

'Poppyland'. Tulips growing wild, and in such profusion as that? Just the kind of tall story that a traveller would bring home with him from a distant country. There was also a pale blue flower which was insignificant individually but triumphant in the mass. Its legions spread a blue mist over the green hill-sides. Where there was water, startled kingfishers added a third variety of blue. Only the tortoises made no contribution to the spectrum.

Our enjoyment of the beauty of the green hills was interrupted at Moghar by a river's crossing our path—not the formidable river for which we were making, but one that we had been advised that we should have to ford en route. A place where it was *not* fordable was indicated by the corpse of a lorry in mid-stream. Its engine was submerged; its body was leaning heavily against the current; and a procession of men, as busy as ants, was unloading its soaked cargo of wool and carrying it on shore piecemeal. On our arrival a cordon of other zealous men was extended across the current to show us where we could pass; and, with this opportune help, we had better luck than the lorry. We were across this first river and among the green hills again. On one low green col, between valley and valley, the snow-capped line of the western Hindu Kush suddenly rose into view, making us wonder how we had found our way through it the day before. Then we left the green hills behind, dropped down into an amphitheatre with rocky mountains behind it, and turned northwards into a gorge, into which a stream was plunging. This stream, we knew, was a tributary of the Murghab ('Fowl-water') River, which rises on the northern face of the western Hindu Kush, flows out of Afghanistan into the Soviet Union, irrigates the oasis of Merv, and then loses itself in the sands of the Central Asian desert.

Meandering over the flat bottom of the amphitheatre, the Darra-i-Boom ('Owl River', as this tributary of the Murghab is called) did not make much impression on us; and when, at the mouth of the gorge, we crossed it uneventfully over an unbroken bridge, we quite looked forward to enjoying its company till it and we reached the Murghab River together.



But soon, coming round a corner in the gorge, we ran into an ominous gang of roadmen working away like beavers with their shovels. They had strung a warning line of little white stones across what had been the road till a few days ago, and now they were just finishing the construction of a ramp leading down from our side of the line of stones into the swirling stream. Beyond the line of stones, yesterday's spate had washed the road away. It was still just possible for bipeds and quadrupeds to clamber round the nose of the cliff where the road had disappeared. Even a bicyclist, if there had been one here, might perhaps have got by, carrying his machine on his back. But two pairs of wheels—even land-rover wheels—could not pass. So there was nothing for it but to drive down the ramp into the torrent, cross it to a spit of land on the opposite shore, and then re-cross it and ascend a second new-made ramp leading back on to the road beyond the gap which the flood-waters had torn in it.

Before we were clear of the gorge, we had had to repeat this manoeuvre, and on the second occasion it was more hazardous. It was not only that, this much farther downstream, the torrent had collected additional waters; at this second point the cliffs of the gorge overhung the road, and bits of their topmost pinnacles were dropping down from time to time. Their crumbly substance had been so demoralised by the unusual fall of rain that the weight of an eagle, perching up aloft there, would have been enough to send a lump of conglomerate hurtling down upon our heads. So it was a dangerous spot to loiter at, not to speak of doing a day's and night's hard labour here.

At this second and more dangerous gap in the road the governor of Bala Murghab was on the spot to see us through and shepherd us on. As we followed his jeep, a final ford over the Boom brought us out into the open valley of the Murghab. I had been longing to set eyes on this famous river, but my intimacy with it immediately became closer than was pleasant. The road ran up a crumbly cliff, which the great swirling river was nibbling away from below; and, as the road mounted, it liquified into a skiddy slime. If one skid

had precipitated us into the Murghab, our cars would not have come off so well as they had in their five crossings of the Boom stream. To our relief, the road soon sheered away from this ledge above the river-bank; and, to our still greater relief, we saw the governor parking his jeep by a telephone-pole and climbing on to its roof to tap the wire. He was going to inform higher authority that we had emerged, safe and sound, from the perils of the road within his local jurisdiction. So the road from this point to Bala Murghab must surely be passable.

Passable, indeed, this section proved to be. It is true that it began, rather ominously, by accompanying the Murghab River into a gorge. The crag on either side of this darband was crowned with a tower. These heights were the ragged edges of the Band-i-Turkistan: a mountain-chain, running parallel to the Hindu Kush and overtopping the highest of its westerly peaks, through which the Murghab River was here breaking its way. Fortunately the road now shied at a broken bridge and kept resolutely to the left bank. We ran on down the narrow valley, side by side with the river, rattling safely over a good rocky surface; and here we encountered an army-corps of Karakul sheep. It was advancing towards us, echeloned in five divisions. It covered this side of the valley with a stipple of black, white, and slate-blue fleeces, while it deafened our ears with its myriad-voiced bleating. The shepherd-boys were carrying brass flutes as well as wooden staves. The shepherds in charge of this immensely valuable live-stock were Pashtuns, but the owners were Uzbeks—the Turkish-speaking inhabitants of Afghan Turkistan. The flocks, the river, the sunshine, the movement, the sound: it was a fascinating scene.

A second darband, and the valley opened out again, with a cultivated, tree-studded plain on either side of the river, and with green hills, like those through which we had travelled earlier in the morning, bounding the horizon, east and west. (The western watershed of the Murghab valley, in this section, is the frontier between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union.) We now had only one anxiety left between us and





X. THE MURGHAB RIVER TWENTY-NINE MILES ABOVE BALA MURGHAB



XI, BALKH: THE WALLS



our hoped-for lunch at Bala Murghab. How were we to cross this swirling river? Evidently the governor had not foreseen any difficulty over that. Perhaps he had carried out an even mightier engineering work here than the ramps that he had built for us on the banks of the Boom stream. When Cyrus the Great wanted to cross the River Gyndes, he made it traversable, according to the legend, by splitting it up into one hundred and eighty rivulets. Had the governor perhaps read this passage of Herodotus and done the same to the River Murghab? As we eyed the Murghab in spate, we speculated; and, when finally the road turned sharp right and headed for the river, we held our breath. But, at this point, there happened the one thing that we had not thought of. The road ran across the swirling river over a substantial bridge and swept us on into Bala Murghab town.

At lunch we made further inquiries about the formidable river, which now lay not more than 30 or 40 miles ahead of us. It was reported to be falling. It was running now, they told us, no deeper than the height of a horse's belly from the ground. This news made it more worth while than ever for us to press on while the fair weather lasted. If we lingered till we were overtaken by another fall of rain, the index might quickly rise to the height of a camel's belly or an elephant's. Just as we were re-embarking in the car, a telephone-message from the Governor-General of Herat overtook us. His Excellency congratulated us on having got so far, but strongly advised us now to return to Herat instead of going forward. After our experience yesterday and this morning, we knew that to return would be impossible. So we wrote the Governor-General a note, taking upon our own heads whatever might be going to happen to us next; and then we went forward on our way. (Our note was perhaps less likely to reach the Governor-General than to be lost in one of the fords across the Boom stream and thence be carried down by the flood-waters for eventual deposit in the sands of Soviet Turkistan.)

Turning eastward from Bala Murghab, the first stretch of the road took us along a valley like the one along which we

had started out this morning from Qala-i-Nau—except that this afternoon's valley had, by this time of day, been dried out by the Sun. Then the road turned north-eastward, wriggled through another maze of green hills, and led us into another west-east valley, broader and longer than the first. (This second valley was the northernmost inside Afghanistan along this stretch of the Soviet-Afghan frontier.) This frontier valley was well populated and well cultivated, but almost tediously long and straight. At last it forked; and here our road dived south-eastward into the green hills, ascended and descended, and brought us out into the southern fork of the valley past the Pashtun village of Ghormash. We had reached the decisive point towards which we had been travelling all day. Someone greeted us in German. He was the governor of Qaisar, a town about half way along the road to Maimana for a traveller who reached—if it was possible to reach—the formidable river's farther bank. Then the road broke off short, and we looked down a mud precipice, some 15 to 18 feet high, at the river below.

Ever since the lunch-time report at Bala Murghab, I had been measuring the heights of horses' bellies with my eye. (Horsemen are frequent on the roads north of the Hindu Kush, for here we are already in Central Asia.) How did this equestrian measure of altitude from the ground compare with the clearance of the more vulnerable parts of a land-rover's engine? This had seemed as if it would be the crucial question, but it was not. By this time the river was not even as high as a donkey's belly. It was no higher than a man's knee. We should have no difficulty in crossing it now, if once we could get at it. But how were any four-wheeled creatures going to get down that sheer fifteen-to-eighteen-foot mud precipice? Looking across to the opposite bank, now more than a hundred yards or so away to the north-east since the nullah had been scooped out by the flood, we saw that a bit of it had been broken down into a ramp dipping to river level. An expectant bus was standing, at the ready, on this opposite ramp's brow. As we looked, an army of men with picks and shovels came swarming up on our side, and began



to break the mud-precipice down into a corresponding ramp here.

How long was the job going to take? Happily it was still broad daylight. While we waited, we heard the story from the German-speaking governor of Qaisar. As lately as yesterday, the flood had not only filled the whole valley but had been sweeping over the road and the adjoining fields. The devastation of the fields and the dampness of the road told the same tale eloquently to the eye. It was amazing that this enormous volume of water should have ebbed away, towards its eventual burial place in the Turkistan desert, in less than twenty-four hours. At the point where we were standing, two rivers meet: the Shishaktu, coming from the east, and the Doabi, coming from the south. The Doabi itself is, as its name indicates, already a union of two rivers. These meet just above the Doabi's confluence with the Shishaktu. So, in effect, not two, but three, rivers discharge at this point. No wonder that their united volume of floodwater can be so great. The volume and violence of the spates is, indeed, a general feature of Afghanistan; for much of the country is built of conglomerate, which does not readily let water through. So the rain-water pours off the surface of the land as fast as it comes down from the sky, instead of soaking into the earth and eventually oozing out of it again in temperately welling springs. The present spate on these three rivers had come down from the mountains as suddenly as it had since disappeared. It had run amok through half-a-dozen villages, ravaging their fields and drowning their live-stock and even a few of their people who had been caught unawares. There had not, the governor told us, ever been a bridge over the united rivers at this point; but all the materials for building one had lately been assembled on the spot. Yesterday's flood, however, had swept these away. They had vanished without leaving a trace. . . .

By this time our ramp was ready, and our drivers were reconnoitring it. It was made of mere mud, and its angle of inclination was (I swear) more than forty-five degrees. Yet in a trice the two cars were safely at the bottom. We slithered down

after them and embarked, feeling sure now that we had victory in our pocket. But no, not yet. As soon as the first car started to charge the first of the three remaining water channels, its wheels sank up to the axles in the mud that had been left high, but not dry, by the recent ebbing of the waters. The second car took a different route, but met the same fate. Would they stay stuck, waiting to be swept away as soon as the next rainfall on the Band-i-Turkistan brought down the next spate? We hastily disembarked again, while the army of ramp-diggers re-formed into an army of load-lifters. With a shout they heaved each car in turn up out of the mud and sped it on its way across the water. Now both cars were over and up the opposite ramp. But what about us passengers? We haughtily rejected hospitable offers to carry us over the water pickaback. We obstinately pulled off our shoes and socks, rolled up our trousers, and waded across the first of the three channels. The water here came up only to our knees, but it was racing at about the pace of a cantering horse, and the shingle was painful for feet not used to going bare. The second channel was a little one; we easily scrambled across that. The third was the biggest, and here our pride failed us. We allowed ourselves, after all, to be carried over it.

They had not told us that there were three more rivers to cross. The first of these three was child's play. They had just finished building a bridge over it for us, and the safe passage of a pilot lorry assured us in advance that the bridge would not collapse under our land-rovers' weight. The second river turned out to be the one where the bridge was broken and the water was horse-belly-high. We charged the flood and came through. The third of these three extra rivers—the Alma—was the most alarming. Coming to a fork in the road and asking the way, we were told that the local administrator was on the look out for us down by the river with a posse of men to help us. That was the first that we had heard of this river Alma, and it was bad news; for, by this time, night had fallen, and this would be our first experience of trying to charge a river in the dark. When we drew abreast of the waiting administrator, our exchange of



courtesies could hardly be heard above the invisible river's roar; but the kind administrator had indeed done well by us. A cordon of men, extended across the flood, marked out the ford, and on the farther bank a lantern-bearer lit up the two lines of little white stones that guided us, by a sinuous course, up on to the road again.

That was the last of this day's rivers, but not the last of its ordeals. Hitherto, the stretches where the road went over a hump had been favourable to our progress, because there the road had usually been dry and hard. But the hills between Qaisar and Maimana must have been made of sheer mud, for here the humps had been eroded into cañons. These were, of course, still baby cañons, not to be compared with the cañon that we had skirted on our dizzy descent from the Sabzak Pass. These road-eating cañons were still only a foot or two deep. But that was deep enough to trap a land-rover, and perhaps to break its axle. And, in the darkness, it was impossible for even the most experienced and alert driver to see these sinister fissures in time to avoid falling into them. Our leading car did fall into one particularly vicious pair, and I just do not know how the driver managed to manoeuvre it out again. The lights of Maimana were a welcome sight at 11.50 p.m. By the time when we rolled into the town, we had been sixteen and a half hours on the road.

Our two days' journey to Maimana from Herat has almost convinced me that a land-rover with a Pathan driver can go anywhere and do anything. But this is not the whole truth. There were obstacles on this journey which would have defeated even our Pathan-driven land-rovers if the Afghan authorities had not gone all out to help us to get through. On this second day's stretch they had built five ramps and one bridge for us, and had manned three fords. I have never had such things done for me before, and almost certainly never shall again. This standard of hospitality is surely something as rare as the unseasonableness of the rains that had called it into action. The memory of it makes one's heart glow even more warmly than the thrill of our barely won battle with the floods.

## 25. The Dasht-i-Leili

BETWEEN Maimana and Shibarghan the floods had put the highroad running through Andkhui out of action, so our wheels must take the camels' short cut over the Dasht-i-Leili. I do not know whether 'dasht' is the equivalent of 'dust' according to the rules of Grimm's law; but the conventional English translation of this Persian word is undoubtedly 'desert'; and, in my mind's eye, the word 'desert' conjured up a mental picture of monotonous gravel plains, interrupted at infrequent intervals by belts of sand. This picture was a composite one, built up out of memories of the Syrian and Arabian deserts and the Arachosian desert, west of Girishk, over which I had been travelling only the other day. I expected the Dasht-i-Leili to be just one more desert like these. Yet a desert called Leila's must in some way be bewitching. It must fascinate the traveller as Leila fascinated Majnun. So my ready-made picture would not fit, since all deserts hitherto known to me had been drab. What, then, was Leila's desert going to be like? Its self-contradictory name aroused my curiosity.

Maimana is surrounded by three rows of those green hills that had been thronging round us ever since we had come down below snow level on this northern side of the Hindu Kush. Maimana's triangular plain is set thick with green fields and green trees. It lies, in fact, within the green belt that is strung out along the snow-mountains' northern foot. At what point on this morning's journey would this greenery turn to dust? Not at the Maimana plain's north-eastern watershed. The valley of the Shirin Tagao, into which the passage through the green hills carried us, was just as green as the Murghab valley above Bala Murghab town. Wheat-fields, poplar groves, and orchards here still alternated with each other. Yet this river was flowing due north, and we knew that it lost itself somewhere in the sands without managing to reach the Oxus. We had sped past Daulatabad town



before we found the provincial director of public works waiting for us at the head of an improvised road that branched off from the highroad to Andkhui and bore eastward. The Shirin Tagao had been in spate, like its sister rivers, and had obliterated the previous crossing. But the director had built a new bridge for us across the river itself, and an army of road-makers had cut a passage for us through the expanse of mud which the flood-waters had deposited beyond the river's farther bank. As we rolled along, on firm dry ground, between two walls of oozing mud, we felt as the Israelites must have felt when they were marching along their dry corridor through the Red Sea.

The mud-flats ended, the road mounted, and we found ourselves in a new world. The green hills had now flattened out into downs; and, as we bowled on, we watched these downs changing into dunes. They made the change ever so gradually. At first they were almost as green as the hills that we had left behind; but, as we travelled on eastward, bald patches of sand began to break through the covering of grass. Then the grass itself gave way to thinner stuff looking like wild wheat. The tulips diminished and the tortoises multiplied. (Our humane drivers took great trouble to avoid running over them.) Finally, on the last stage of this track across the undulating dasht, the sand prevailed. We ploughed through a dozen miles of dunes before coming down on to the great plain of the Oxus basin and running into Shibarghan across another river that had just been committing the usual ravages on its way from the snows to the sands.

That down-and-dune country between river and river had been the Dasht-i-Leili. Had it deserved its name by turning out to be bewitching? Yes, it had. It was a true desert in the sense that it was waterless, except for a few rain-fed cisterns at which the shepherds were watering their slate-blue Karakul flocks. The camels that we passed were carrying drinking-water for their human companions in enormous skin bags. The air, too, was fresh, as desert air ought to be. Even the sheep-dogs were charming, as they bounded alongside of us, thirsting for our blood. Their tails were shaven, with a pom-

pom of woolly hair left on at the extremity, and this poodle-like appendage made it impossible to take their savageness quite seriously. Startled by the noise of our engines, a host of such birds (rosy pastors), lying in wait for any passing host of locusts, filled the air with whirring wings. Little creatures (kangaroo rats), looking like Alpine marmots, sat up on their hind-legs and gazed at us inquisitively. Eagles wheeled overhead, hoping to snatch at least a marmot, if not a lamb. Yet lambs and marmots disported themselves below, unconcerned and unscathed. Yes, Leila's dasht deserves its bewitching name.

## 26. Balkh

TODAY I have seen Balkh with my own eyes. My first view was of the southern wall, as one catches sight of it from the road running in from the south. My second view was of the vast interior of the city, as one surveys it from the Borj-i-Ayran: the pavilion perched on the city-wall's massive southwest corner. My third view was from the citadel (a whole city in itself; you could easily pack into it the Shahr-i-Faridun of Farah). Descended from the eminence on the citadel's southwestern rim, the Borj-i-Ayran looked as if it were as far away as, say, Hammersmith is from Westminster. My fourth view was from the citadel's citadel. From here one sees not only the whole interior of the city, and most of the circuit of the walls, but also a wide stretch of the surrounding countryside. My fifth view was of the southern wall again, but this time from the top of the more easterly of the two Zoroastrian fire-temples that stand on either side of the southern approach. My last view was of the south-east wall: I was looking back over my shoulder as we left Balkh by the new direct road to Mazar-i-Sharif.

I suppose the area included inside even the outermost of the city-walls of Balkh is really trifling by comparison with



the built-up area of present-day Chicago or Los Angeles, where every point is always thirty miles distant from every other. Yet Los Angeles and Chicago leave me unimpressed, while Balkh—this empty shell of a dead city—has knocked me quite flat. I had been prepared to be impressed by its grandeur. I had pored over photographs and plans; I had read all the descriptions on which I could lay hands. But this second-hand picture had given me no idea of the reality. Let touring Chicagoans look down their noses. I feel sure that visiting Alexandrians, in the days when Balkh was the capital of the Graeco-Bactrian Empire, will have been awe-stricken. And I also feel sure that visiting Romans, in the days when Balkh was one of the capitals of the Kushan Empire, will have felt the same sensation. Anyway, I myself was awe-stricken today. Those giant mud walls and towers and mounds give, even in their present decay, a vivid sense of the momentum of human effort on the grand scale sustained over a span of dozens of centuries.

Herodotus has described Egypt as being a gift of the River Nile. Balkh can be described, with equal truth, as being a gift of the river that bears the city's name. A bastion of the Hindu Kush juts far out into the Oxus plain. Its outer face is a bare dry mountain wall. But at one point some prophet mightier than Moses, or god mightier than Poseidon, had cloven the rock and liberated a river that taps the mountain-waters of the massive Hazarajat. One can cross the river dryshod, at the point where it bursts out of its gorge, thanks to the munificence of Imam Bukri ('Reverend Maiden Aunt'), who spent her savings on building here a bridge which has survived even the recent portentous floods. As one passes over her bridge, one can measure with one's eye the volume of water that is pouring impetuously through the arch. It is pouring into a zone of the great plain in which the soil is potentially as fertile as any in the World. Lead water to it, and it will bring forth, in abundance, every kind of crop and fruit. For the last three thousand years at least, and perhaps for another three thousand before that, human skill has been enabling the water brought from the mountains by the Balkh

River to do its utmost for the sustenance of man and beast. The river has no sooner entered the plain than it is distributed into half-a-dozen canals, and these arteries are tapped, in their turn, by innumerable runnels. The lie of the land guides these life-giving waters westwards, parallel with the northward face of the mountain-wall. They run all the way to Aqcha and beyond, some fifty-two miles and more from the Imam Bukri's bridge. This is one of the largest oases in the World, and Balkh stands in a commanding position. It stands right out in the irrigated plain, yet near enough to the mouth of the gorge to be able to control the distribution of the waters on their westward course.

No one can tell how old Balkh is. Its claim to be 'the Mother of Cities' is disputed today by Jericho; and it cannot, as Jericho's claim can, be tested by excavation. The water from Jericho's spring has not prevented the archaeologists from digging down there to virgin soil below the lowest Neolithic level. The more abundant waters of the Balkh River have set the water-table here just below Kushan level; and the Kushan regime at Balkh is no older than the first century of the Christian Era. A single fragment of pottery may date a whole phase of civilization, but mud walls—even the awe-inspiring masses of the walls of Balkh—do not tell the archaeologists their secrets.

This sun-dried-brick architecture is timeless. At Balkh, for instance, looking out from the peak of the citadel's citadel over the countryside, one saw, below, one of those ribâts — four-square forts, with a round tower at each corner—which the Amir 'Abdarrahman Khan planted at strategic points in his dominions. The Amir's rabât was a late-nineteenth-century minnow; Balkh, towering above it, was an age-old whale. But whale and minnow were made of the same substance—the timeless mud of the irrigated plain—and, a thousand years from now, the archaeologists may be hard put to it to determine the two buildings' relative age. This point was impressed on me when, on our way back from Balkh to Mazar-i-Sharif, the new road carried us through the middle of another deserted four-square fort—this one large enough



not to be put out of countenance even by comparison with Balkh itself. Inside this mud-brick enclosure, the half-ruined mud-brick houses looked as if they must have been abandoned by their inhabitants in the same catastrophe that had laid Balkh desolate. Yet, on inquiry, we ascertained that this was a cantonment that had been built for 'Abdarrahman Khan only about a hundred years ago, when, in his boyhood, he was serving his military apprenticeship. The mud that is the only building-material to be found in the Balkh oasis reduces all buildings made of it to a cryptic coevality.

All, then, that we can learn about the history of the city of Balkh from the titanic remains of its mud walls is that Balkh has been one of the greatest cities in the World for about eighty-five per cent. of the time that has passed since such a thing as civilization first came into existence some 5000 years ago. It is only within the last 750 years that Balkh has fallen on evil days. In this recent age she has been dealt successive blows by three deadly enemies: the Mongol war-lord Chingis; the Turkish war-lord Tamerlane; and the Arab caliph 'Ali; and it is 'Ali who has struck the last and deadliest blow of all. The two war-lords could wreck Balkh's irrigation-system and massacre the city's inhabitants. Yet, after each of these first two catastrophes, the survivors would repair the canals, patch up the breaches in the walls, and set Balkh going again, at however greatly reduced a level of vitality. It had not yet occurred to anyone that the oasis watered by the Balkh River could have any other capital city than Balkh itself. The coup de grâce to ancient Balkh was given by the Caliph 'Ali when, in the fifteenth century of the Christian Era, under the regime of grim Tamerlane's cultivated successors, the fourth caliph's tomb was discovered, on a spot a few miles to the east of the Imam Bukri's bridge, which, since then, has been known as Mazar-i-Sharif: 'the noble mausoleum'. The tomb of so exalted a hero of Islam was bound to encase itself within a magnificent mosque and then to conjure up a city round its precincts. The blue mosque and the present-day city of Mazar were inevitable consequences of the finding of the holy tomb; and, since there is

not room, even in the great Balkh oasis, for more than one first-class city, Balkh necessarily decreased as Mazar increased, until eventually Mazar sucked Balkh almost dry. (Seleucia, Ctesiphon, and Baghdad once played the same trick on Babylon.)

In Balkh's losing battle with the parvenue city that was usurping Balkh's age-old monopoly, Balkh's natural ally would have been Najaf, the Shi'i city in 'Iraq that disputes Mazar's claim to contain the Caliph 'Ali's sepulchre. Considering that Kufa, within a stone's-throw of Najaf, is admittedly the place in which 'Ali met his death, Najaf's claim is intrinsically more convincing than distant Mazar's is. Millions of Shi'i Muslims have staked their hopes of salvation on the authenticity of Najaf's claim by having themselves buried there. But the mausoleum at Mazar is the Sunni World's masterly retort to the Shi'ah's attempt to turn 'Ali into an exclusively Shi'i martyr. By discovering the tomb at Mazar-i-Sharif and building the Blue Mosque over it, the Sunnis have vindicated their claim to be just as genuinely devoted to 'Ali as his over-zealous Shi'i devotees. In this tug-o'-war for the possession of one of Islam's most eminent worthies, high ecclesiastical politics have come into play; and Balkh has been the victim of these. The same fate has overtaken Nishapur. Not Chingis, but the Imam Reza, finally drained the remnant of Nishapur's population out of the vast quadrangle enclosed within its still standing mud walls. And the Imam Reza ruined Nishapur, as the Caliph 'Ali ruined Balkh, by conjuring up a new city round his mausoleum.

In Balkh's long history these last 750 years of desolation and eclipse have been an abnormal interlude, and today life is springing up again within the circuit of those huge mud walls. It is perhaps unlikely that, within any foreseeable time, Balkh will recapture from Mazar the primacy that Mazar has stolen from her. But Balkh is already profiting by the economic revival in her oasis, which is part of the general revival of economic life in Afghanistan. In good and bad times alike, the Balkh River has continued to collect the waters of the Hazarajat highlands and to convey them to the



plain at the mountain-bastion's foot. So long as the river flows, the city that has lent it her name can still live in hope of an eventual recovery.

The present vitality of the great oasis impressed itself upon us on the Monday morning on which we were travelling from Shibarghan to Mazar through Aqcha. Monday happens to be market-day in both Aqcha and Shibarghan; and, as we rolled out of Shibarghan along the eastward road, we met a throng of horsemen—and, of course, donkeymen too—riding westwards into Shibarghan to market. On either side of the road there was continuous cultivation, and we could not detect the point at which the responsibility for carrying the water to the fields was taken over from the little river of Shibarghan by the westernmost runnels of the greater river of Balkh. But, if it was difficult to find the hydrographical watershed, there could be no doubt about the human one. The direction in which the horses' and donkeys' heads were turned was now reversed. They were now heading, not for Shibarghan, but for Aqcha; and it was lucky for us that we were now swimming with the tide and not against it. The throng of riders kept on increasing. Not even Rotten Row, as I remember it in my childhood, was so crowded with early-morning riders as this Shibarghan-Aqcha road was on the morning of this market-day. These Uzbek centaurs' business was matter-of-fact; they were going to sell a sheep or to buy a tin of kerosine. But they rode with an air, as if they were still at large on their ancestral steppes. It was a festive scene.

## 27. Sighting the Oxus

SINCE childhood I had dreamed of one day seeing the River Oxus, the legendary frontier between Iran and Turan, and the actual one between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union. I had dreamed this dream without really expecting that it

would ever come true. And now here I was, not only free to see the famous river, but also free to choose between alternative routes to its Afghan bank. I could reach it from Mazar-i-Sharif or I could reach it from Kundûz. The choice was left open for me; but I was advised that the road from Kundûz was the better of the two; and this was a decisive point in this year of exceptionally late and heavy rains. It would have been exasperating to have to return to Mazar defeated, after sticking in the mud before coming within sight even of the trees along the Oxus River's edge.

Gazing northwards from the highest point of the highest mound of Balkh, I had not been able to see even the northern limit of cultivation. And I knew that, beyond the point at which the canals gave up their last drop of water to the last of the fields, there was a belt of barren desert between the great oasis and the great frontier river's Afghan bank. To make my dream come true, I had been told that I must cross one desert between Mazar and the Kundûz River, and a second between Kundûz town and the nearest point on the Oxus River's twisting course. I had assumed that these two deserts would be just two monotonous samples of the plain, minus the water that transfigured a patch of it into the Balkh oasis; and I had resigned myself to paying the price of a dull journey for the privilege of setting eyes on the fabulous river.

Between Mazar and Tashkurgan my expectations were fulfilled. Whatever consideration may have determined the site of the Caliph 'Ali's Sunni mausoleum, it was not chosen, as Balkh had been, with an eye to convenience of access to the irrigated land. Mazar lies on the extreme eastern edge of the Balkh oasis; and in this direction the fertilising waters keep the road company for only the first mile or two out of town. The road runs on across a desert of the conventional gravelly kind, till another cleft in the mountains, cloven, no doubt, by some lesser prophet than Moses, signals that a miniature replica of the Balkh oasis is round the corner of the next spur. As we rounded the corner and ran, once more, into fields and rivulets, my eye was caught and held by a very big rectangular enclosure on the last slope of the mountain above the



town of Tashkurgan, towards which we were heading. It seemed to be too big to be one of the Amir 'Abdarrahman Khan's standard-size ribâts. Was it some nameless deserted city? Or was that dome peeping out above its mud-brick walls the mausoleum of some super-eminent Sunni Muslim worthy—the Caliph 'Umar, at a guess? How much I should like to satisfy my curiosity by peering through its gate. At that moment a traffic policeman directed us out of the main road into one leading past the intriguing enclosure's lower wall, and then—this was too good to be true—a second traffic policeman directed us into the enclosure's single gate. There was just room for a land-rover to squeeze in between the iron-studded wooden doors. (We learnt afterwards that these had been brought there from Kabul on an elephant's back.) The interior proved to be not a ruined city but a well-tended garden, and the dome was a pleasure-dome, not a mausoleum. It was 'Abdarrahman's work after all, but it was a pleasaunce, not a fort. The local administrator was inviting us to break our journey there.

This pleasure-dome of 'Abdarrahman Khan's is called Jahan-nima ('World-View'). And, when one climbs to the topmost terrace, round the dome itself, a whole world does in truth spring into sight. A ribbon of foliage, wriggling up into the cleft in the mountains and disappearing there, shows where the life-giving waters come down and where a road goes up that leads, over the Hindu Kush, to India. Across the river below its exit from the gorge, one big ruined castle and one little one mark the site of the Tashkurgan of the Age of Insecurity. Below the foot of 'Abdarrahman's garden lies the present-day town. Beyond the town, the oasis spreads right and left in a pattern of light green fields and darker green trees. This Tashkurgan oasis does not extend beyond the horizon, as the Balkh oasis does when one views it from the citadel of Balkh city. From the summit of Jahan-nima the eye can take in the whole of the Tashkurgan oasis at one glance. But, when one goes down into Tashkurgan city and crosses the nullah in which the river flows through a maze of mat-roofed bazaars, one is astonished at

the skill which has coaxed so small a flow of water into irrigating so large an extent of thirsty land.

Beyond the Tashkurgan oasis's sharp-cut eastern edge, the dasht envelops the road again, but it soon begins to exert itself to belie the conventional connotation of its name. First it climbs a ramp of wind-blown sand on to the instep of a foot that the mountain thrusts out northward across the traveller's path. The summit of the Shibaghlu Pass is green; and, if a dust-haze had not obscured the view, we should have seen another strip of green on the northern horizon, only some seventeen miles away. We should have seen the belt of trees along the bank of the River Oxus, which here bends southward as if, on its way westward, it had swerved from its course in an effort to kiss the mountain's toe. But our hoped-for distant pre-view of the river was blotted out by the volatile dust that had so recently been sticky mud.

Beyond the Shibaghlu Kotal the road drops down on to the plain again and is once more enveloped by the dasht; but, for the second time, the dasht springs a surprise on the conventional-minded traveller. It here transfigures itself into a green valley winding among rounded green hills like those of Qala-i-Nau and Bala Murghab. Once more, the green is half covered by a mist of red and blue flowers. Tents reappear and, with them, camels and flocks. The traveller becomes almost convinced that he must have turned back on his tracks and have re-crossed the Doabi ford, without noticing it, in a fit of absence of mind—so like is this easterly landscape to the green Badghisat. The flat valley winds on; like the valley between Bala Murghab and Ghormash it seems endless. But at last the road sheers away from the valley's head and mounts towards a pass.

Here the road-builders have been outwitted by the flood-waters. They have driven cuttings through the humpier hills, in the fond hope of making the passage less arduous for wheels. But the waters have taken possession of the engineers' work and have eroded it into cañons which anything on wheels must avoid like grim death. So the wheel-tracks now take a switchback course over the crest of the humps over-



hanging the road; and the passenger, clinging nervously to his seat, gets a glimpse, now and then, of a string of donkeys or camels picking its way between the cañons, down there in the cutting. The eroding waters have considerably left a passage for legitimate four-footed traffic still to pass, but they have felt no obligation to respect the more exacting requirements of the traditional quadruped's new-fangled four-wheeled supplanter.

Switchbacking over the humps, our four-wheelers reached the head of the Ergenek Pass, and here the ground suddenly fell away beneath us. We found ourselves looking out eastwards over a broad green plain watered by the Kundûz River. A zig-zag descent, a straight run towards the river, a ferry, and we were heading for a line of bluffs beyond the river's north-east bank. On the nearest bluff a country house, set in a garden, was looking back across the river-valley towards the pass over which we had come. How pleasant it would be to sit on the balcony up there and watch the Sun set, beyond the Oxus, over the mountains of Soviet Tajikistan. And, once again, our wish was unexpectedly fulfilled. We did just that, from just there, on two evenings running. And, in between the two, we had seen the Oxus.

Kundûz town stands on a triangular green plateau between the valleys of two rivers that meet below the triangle's apex: the river of Kundûz and the river of Khanabad. Both rivers tap the snow-mountains, and there is more water in this Kundûz doab than in the whole panjab of Qandahar. Heading for Qyzyl Qala, the new port on the Oxus's Afghan bank, we left Kundûz by a northward road, crossed the Khanabad River above its junction with the Kundûz River, and mounted the bluffs beyond. Surely, from the top, we should catch our first glimpse of the belt of trees indicating the presence of the Oxus. But the view that did open out before us from the crest was different and surprising. A rolling green plateau—a replica of the Dasht-i-Leili—extended in all directions as far as the eye could see; and this vast expanse was covered with a greater multitude of tents, flocks, herds, and droves than we had yet seen anywhere in the

course of our journey round Afghanistan. Man and beast were enjoying the still fresh green pasture; and they were not living in dread of the coming onset of the summer heat. For, when the grass wilted here on the Takht-i-Zal plateau, they would move up to their summer pastures in the highlands of Badakhshan. Meanwhile, this plateau that we were crossing was a springtime paradise. We had no eyes for the familiar sheep and goats and camels; these were eclipsed for us by the troops of happy horses roaming free. They looked just like Tatar horses in a Chinese picture.

The green plateau, with its teeming life, rolled on and on, while our forty miles' run from Kundûz to the Oxus dwindled to fifteen miles, twelve miles, ten, still with nothing but the green plateau yet in sight. Then, suddenly, the rolling turf turned into sand-hills; the tents changed their style from the Pashtu to the Türkmen pattern, the road began to drop, and, far away towards our right front, a long arc of low cliffs came into view, crowned, at regular intervals, by a row of perpendicular erections that might be wireless-masts or cable-pylons. They might be, but they were not. I recognised them for what they were; for I had seen them, three years ago, along the Soviet side of the Russo-Persian frontier running westward from Astara on the western shore of the Caspian Sea. They were observation-towers along the barbed-wire fence that has become notorious as 'the Iron Curtain'. At the foot of those cliffs crowned by those towers, the Oxus must be curving round to meet our road's terminus.

A lorry-park, a lighthouse, a crane, a quay, and suddenly the Oxus was at our feet. How broad is the river here at Qyzyl Qala? At a guess, I should put its breadth here at about 200 yards, and—guessing again—I should say that its volume here is greater than the Indus's at Attock. The volume of the Oxus at Qyzyl Qala seemed to me to be about that of the Elbe at the point where one crosses the Elbe en route between Köln and Berlin. If the Oxus is really as big as this at Qyzyl Qala, it must be about as big as the Rhine is at Köln below the confluence of the lowest of its lower tributaries. En route to Qyzyl Qala I had crossed two of these:



the Kundûz and the Khanabad rivers. Their united stream forces its way across the desert to join the Oxus below Qyzyl Qala, instead of losing itself in the sands like the Balkh River, the Murghab, the Hari Rud, and all the other rivers, farther west, that descend upon the Oxus plain from the northern face of the Hindu Kush. The Kundûz and Khanabad rivers each singly discharge, I should say, a greater volume of water than the Balkh River does. Moreover, just below the point where the Oxus is joined by the united Kundûz-Khanabad River from the Afghan side, it is joined from the Soviet side by the greatest of the rivers of Tajikistan: the Waksh. This tributary's name must have given the Ancient Greek geographers the name Oxus for the main river, which the people on its banks know nowadays as the Amu. The Greeks' local informant must have regarded the Waksh, and not the Amu above its junction with the Waksh, as being the principal stream. The Waksh and the Kundûz River, between them, must swell the Oxus into an even mightier river than the one that I saw at Qyzyl Qala.

Afghanistan's new Oxus-port at Qyzyl Qala may bring about something like a revolution in the country's system of communications. Hitherto the normal route along which Afghanistan has brought in her imports from abroad has been the sea-route to Karachi, the rail-route from Karachi to Peshawar, and the lorry-route from Peshawar to Kabul and beyond. By the new Oxus route, goods consigned to Afghanistan from Czechoslovakia, for example, can come by rail, without any breaking of bulk, all the way to the Soviet Oxus-port of Termez, and can be shipped up-stream from there to Qyzyl Qala for transport by road into the interior of Afghanistan. Soviet engineers are now driving a tunnel for the Afghan Government through the Hindu Kush, underneath the twelve-thousand-feet-high Salang Pass. When this tunnel is finished, the north-south road from Qyzyl Qala to Kabul will be easier for wheeled traffic than the east-west road to Kabul from Peshawar.

This will not be the first time that the navigation of the Oxus has been one of the determining factors in world

history. In the second century B.C. the Water Sakas—Iranian forerunners of the Cossacks—applied the boatmanship which they had learnt on the Oxus to the navigation of the Helmand and the Indus. Like the Cossacks in a later age, the Sakas made their conquests by boat as well as on horseback. The present-day Russian navigators of the Oxus are most unlikely to try to use their command of the river, Cossack-fashion, for making conquests of the old-fashioned military kind. They will try, not to dominate Afghanistan by force of arms, but to attract her as a sun-flower is attracted by the Sun. Evidently the Russians have every right to do this if they can. And, of course, Pakistan and the Western World have an equal right to compete with the Soviet Union for Afghanistan's custom by making the Karachi trade-route more attractive for the Afghans than it is at present. If one chooses, one may call this economic competition 'the Cold War'. But giving it a bad name will not make it a bad thing. It is not at all a bad thing either for Afghanistan or for the rest of us.

As I stood on the quay at Qyzyl Qala and looked at the Soviet ships meeting the Afghan lorries there, I found myself ardently wishing Afghanistan and the Soviet Union success in this imaginative joint economic enterprise of theirs. For a Westerner to grudge success to them would not only be ungenerous; it would also be short-sighted. We are living in an age in which the countries of the World have become interdependent. The prosperity of each is bound up with the prosperity of the rest. And Afghanistan is a country that cannot prosper unless she can establish adequate lines of communication for her foreign trade. So, more power to Qyzyl Qala!



## 28. Surkh Kotal

MOST of this planet's land-surface, and a good deal of its water-surface as well, is fascinatingly interesting for an historian. Nature or Man, or the two together, have seen to that. But one journey, or indeed one whole life-time spent exclusively on travelling, is far too short to allow the eager traveller to see more than a small fraction of the surface of the globe. Every view is bounded by an horizon; at every stage the traveller has to choose some single direction from among all the quarters of the compass. And the unseen and unvisited lands in the many directions that the traveller has to renounce give him twinges of regret which he might perhaps have escaped if he had unadventurously stayed at home.

We had chosen to make a circular tour of Afghanistan; and, time and again, I had felt a twinge at not being able also to fly off at a tangent. We had started from Point 3.00 o'clock—Kabul—and when, at Point 7.30 o'clock, we duly turned, according to plan, north-westward from Farah en route for Herat, I had longed also to be able simultaneously to turn south and set eyes on Seistan, where the Helmand River splays out into a delta and empties itself into a hamûn. I was haunted by memories of photographs illustrating an article in *The Geographical Journal* which had caught my imagination when I was a child. When, at Point 10.30 o'clock, we turned, once more according to plan, north-eastwards from Herat en route for Qala-i-Nau, I had longed also to be able simultaneously to turn westward down the course of the Hari Rud and pay a second visit to Mashhad. To-day we were at Point 1.30 o'clock, and our plan demanded that we should turn south from Kundûz and head for Surkh Kotal and Bamian. Was it not enough that yesterday I had set eyes on the Oxus? Had not that forty-miles-long tangential journey been sufficiently rewarding to satisfy me? Alas, on the road from Kundûz to Qyzyl Qala, I had paused to climb Kundûz's deserted citadel, and that

same evening I had mounted a tumulus overhanging the bozkachi playing-field to the south of Kundûz town. From both these look-out points, I had gained an eastward view that was as compulsively attractive as a siren's voice. Eastward lay the broad green plain of the Khanabad River, and, beyond the plain, rose the foothills of the highlands of Badakhshan. From Shibarghan onwards as far as Kundûz I had been travelling in Marco Polo's tracks. But, at Kundûz, Polo had not turned southward, as I was scheduled to do. He had travelled on eastward across that Khanabad plain, had traversed Taliqan (thrilling name), and had mounted the Badakhshan highlands up that valley visible over there on the eastern horizon. Polo had reached Badakhshan a sick man. He had stayed there as many months as it took him to recover his health. And he had left Badakhshan so hale and hearty that he had been able to complete his journey to China—and this over the Pamirs. Badakhshan: at this very moment my Japanese friend, Professor Iwamura of the University of Kyoto, was on his way to Badakhshan in order to study the nomads' life up there in their summer pastures round Lake Shiwa. O, why could I not see Badakhshan as well as Surkh Kotal and Bamian? This was the sharpest twinge of regret for not attaining an unattainable goal that I had felt so far in the course of my present clockwise journey round Afghanistan. The sight of Surkh Kotal was soon to assuage it.

Renouncing Badakhshan, and resolutely taking the southward road from Kundûz, we began to follow the Kundûz River up-stream. Above 'Aliabad the river drew us into a gorge, and I resigned myself to remaining imprisoned in this gorge till it deposited us at the northern foot of some pass over the Hindu Kush. But the landscape of the Iranian plateau is always springing surprises on the Western traveller. After a bit the gorge culminated in a darband, just not too narrow for road and river to squeeze through without being throttled, and then the country abruptly opened out into the broad flat plain of Baghlan. At the same moment a gang of giant snow-mountains raised their heads above the hills



round the plain, and ranged themselves in a semi-circle: to right of us, to left of us, in front of us. 'Have you reckoned with us?' they said. This challenge made us feel slightly uneasy. We had not forgotten our experiences with mountains and rivers between Herat and Maimana. Perhaps unwisely, we decided to bluff, so we answered off-handedly: 'You failed to stop Cyrus and Alexander and Kanishka and Chingis and Babur. You failed to stop His Majesty the King only the day before yesterday. So what is the use of pretending that you will be able to stop us?' The snow-mountains made no comment. They simply lowered their heads and crouched down again, out of sight, to bide their time.

In the middle of the plain of Baghlan stands the residency of the Governor of Kataghan Province. It is a round house, perched on the crown of a round tepc, which must once have been either a stupa or a castle or each of these in turn. We called on the Governor, drank tea with him, and drove on, till road and river once again ran the gauntlet of another darband, and once again just managed to squeeze their way through into a still larger plain that unexpectedly opened out ahead. The plain was, in fact, a double one, shaped like an hour-glass; and, coursing along the second plain's eastern side towards Pul-i-Khumri, we soon saw the giant stairway of Surkh Kotal rising from its western edge.

It is always an extraordinary sensation to see, in the life, some famous building or landscape with which one has long been familiar from photographs, maps, and plans. At this very moment, when I raise my eyes from the paper on which I am writing these lines, I see below me the fresh green tops of a poplar avenue leading to a salmon-coloured cliff with two gigantic statues carved in it, and the black mouths of innumerable caves riddling its face. I am looking at Bamian in real life; and my feelings here and now are those that I felt when, three days ago, I set eyes for the first time on the real Surkh Kotal. We were at the famous site that afternoon, and we spent the next day, too, there in the company of Professor Daniel Schlumberger, the head of the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan, and his colleagues. It

was a wonderful experience to be initiated into Surkh Kotal by the savants who had discovered and disinterred this long-since-forgotten shrine.

From the plain it looks as if the giant staircase mounted a spur of the hills that bound the plain on this side. But from the summit you see that the fire-temple crowns a hill that, like the hill crowned by Persepolis, is isolated by a ravine from a higher hill behind it. On the second day I climbed to the top of the deserted fortress, Islamic in date, by which this higher hill is crowned, and then found that this hill, in its turn, is separated from the main mass of the bounding hills by another ravine through which the camel-and-donkey trail runs today. Thus, together, the fortress hill and Surkh Kotal command three tracks, reckoning in the present wheel-road that skirts the foot of the giant staircase. This modern road must also have been an ancient one, or the foot of the staircase would not have been sited where it is.

Surkh Kotal's position is indeed a commanding one. The three tracks are so many variants of a road that comes from the south—eventually from the far side of the Hindu Kush. North of Surkh Kotal this south-and-north road bends to the left and passes between the hills and a spring which bubbles out below their foot. Beyond that point the road divides. The left-hand branch runs on north-westward up a bay of the Surkh Kotal plain and over a col into the valley of the Tashkurgan River, to break out of the gorge, side by side with the river, into the Tashkurgan oasis. Since civilization began, this has been one of the perennial roads between India and Balkh, and so it still is today. As for the right-hand branch of the great north road, it bends north-eastward round the spring, runs through the waist of the hour-glass into the plain of Baghlan, and heads for Kundûz and Badakhshan.

The site of Surkh Kotal was chosen by an emperor who ruled from the Oxus to the Jumna. It was chosen, it seems virtually certain, by Kanishka. This ex-nomad Kushan empire-builder in the first or second century of the Christian Era has become famous as a patron of Buddhism. It was thanks to his patronage that Buddhism was able to cross the



Hindu Kush. And this was the crucial stage in the Mahayana's long trek from India to Eastern Asia round the western and northern flanks of Tibet. But the religion to which Surkh Kotal was dedicated by Kanishka was not Buddhism. It was a form—not necessarily, or even probably, the Zoroastrian form—of a cult of fire, or of a divinity honoured, and perhaps symbolised, in the fire kept alive on the altar.

The fire-altar stood in the middle of a four-square temple, with a passage round it for the devout laity to circumambulate. This temple-plan is strikingly different from the Greek plan, in which the worship centres, not on a fire-altar, but on the statue of a divinity hidden in a holy of holies at the far end of an oblong building. The contrast between the two plans, and between the two ideas that these embody, is all the more piquant at Surkh Kotal because the Greek order of architecture has been employed here for decorating this un-Greek place of worship. This touch of Greekness is represented by the surviving stone bases of some of the columns: the four columns in the temple itself, and the series that once supported the roof of a portico surrounding the great four-square court in the middle of which the temple stands. Each time that I entered this court, I found myself moved by its majesty.

The name 'Surkh Kotal' has been given to this shrine by its French discoverers. For, before they disinterred it, the hill on which it stands was anonymous. 'Surkh Kotal' means 'Red Pass' (the soil is red, and the hill commands the passage). The shrine was fortified. There is an inner line of fortifications enclosing the shrine itself, and an outer line surrounding the whole hill-top and including the dwelling-houses on it. These houses are modest: Surkh Kotal was both a shrine and a fort, but it was not also a palace.

The most important single object that the French Archaeological Delegation has discovered at Surkh Kotal, up to date, is an inscription in the Greek alphabet, but not in the Greek language. Here the Emperor Kanishka's name appears more than once; but it remains an open question whether

the inscription is Kanishka's own or is the work of later patrons who restored and re-dedicated a shrine that Kanishka had founded. The language is a hitherto unknown Iranian one: perhaps the language of the local Bactrian population rather than the language of their Kushan rulers. A study of Kanishka's surviving coins in their probable chronological order suggests, I understand, that Kanishka deposed Greek from being the official language of the Kushan Empire. The Surkh Kotal inscription tells us that he retained the Greek alphabet as his vehicle for giving written form to the Iranian language—Bactrian or whatever it may prove to be—in which this inscription is written. On the other hand, the Parthians, in what is now Persia, and the Soghdians in the valley of the Zarafshan River, north-west of the Oxus (the region of Bokhara and Samarqand), did not choose to write their respective Iranian languages in the Greek alphabet of the Old Persian Empire's Greek successor-states. They both chose to employ the Aramaic alphabet, which had been current in the Persian Empire before this was liquidated by Alexander. The Aramaic language, written in its own alphabet, had been the most widely-used of the Persian Empire's official languages.

But these are mere crumbs from Homer's banquet. My Homer, at Surkh Kotal, was the head of the French Archaeological Delegation, Professor Schlumberger himself. So, enough of these scraps of second-hand information. The reader can do better by going direct to the source; and I can do better by recording one or two experiences of my own which have printed themselves sharply on my memory.

I shall always remember sitting with Monsieur Schlumberger under a tree overhanging the spring down in the plain, just short of the bifurcation of the two ancient highways—one leading to Balkh and the other to Kundûz and Badakhsan. Under the next tree a child was sitting and smiling at us. The day was still hot, but a cool breeze was fanning us from across the water. As we were talking, my eye was caught, first by the shadowy forms of fish gliding in shoals below the surface of the water, and then by the



pattern of the reeds in the reed-bed into which the spring-fed pool discharged its overflow. Suddenly, in my mind's eye, I saw the bas-relief at Taq-i-Bostan portraying the Sasanid Persian Emperor Khusrau Parviz engaged in a royal hunt in a marsh. It was the pattern of the reeds that had conjured up the vision. The living reeds here at Surkh Kotal made the selfsame pattern as the rock-cut reeds at distant Kirmanshah.

I shall also always remember a small but amiable incident at tea in the secondary fire-temple that now serves the French archaeologists as their living-room. I noticed His Majesty smiling, through the window, at someone outside, and I assumed that this must be one of his subjects—perhaps some nomad on trek—who had come to pay his respects to his sovereign. But what I saw, when I looked out, was one of those marmot-like beasties that abound in the green hills north of the Hindu Kush. The hill crowned by Surkh Kotal slopes up steeply above that window, and the little creature was sitting on his hindlegs, at the mouth of his hole, and was watching His Majesty with wondering eyes. Evidently, from this commanding observation-post, he had become familiar with the regular occupants of the larger hole on the other side of the window. The sight of a king sitting among them had surprised him. A wondering marmot and a smiling king: their quaint encounter made a charming scene.

## 29. Bamian

ON the evening of our second day at Surkh Kotal the snow-mountains gave signs that they had not forgotten our passage of arms with them the day before. First they raised a dust-storm on the plain. This reduced visibility almost to zero, and all but succeeded in stopping us from getting back to Pul-i-Khumri. One cannot drive blind along the stretch of this road where it overhangs the river. After that the mountains discharged a thunderstorm on their northern foothills.

By the time when we were setting out for Bamian the next morning, the Kundûz River was running perceptibly higher and faster than the night before. We took the road with some misgivings.

Quickly the valley narrowed, as we mounted it, into a gorge. Then it opened out again, with characteristic Iranian unexpectedness. Then it narrowed once more, swept us through a bazaar chock-a-block with bivouacking buses and lorries, carried us over a bridge, and would have run us full tilt into a rock-wall, if our wary drivers had not taken a right-angle turn just in time. The crowded parking-place was Doshi; the wall was the wall of the Hindu Kush, below the northern ascent to the twelve-thousand-feet-high Salang Pass, and the river that we had just crossed was not our familiar companion the Kundûz River; it was the Andarab. The two rivers meet head-on, the Andarab descending westwards from the Khawak Pass, and the Kundûz River eastwards from the Shibar Pass. Colliding just south of Doshi and turning north, they form the greater river whose course we had been following, upward and southward, since leaving Kundûz town.

As we sped over our bridge, I caught sight of a more imposing bridge over the Andarab River higher up. This is the bridge that is to carry the road from Kundûz straight on southwards towards the tunnel which Russian engineers have undertaken to bore through the Hindu Kush underneath the Salang Pass. When this tunnel is an accomplished fact, there will be a straight run, along a tarmac road, all the way to Kabul from Afghanistan's Oxus-port at Qyzyl Qala. But this is still 'music of the future'. The present north-and-south road, which we were following, has to run up to the head of the Kundûz River, surmount the Shibar Pass, and then run down from the head of the Ghorband River. In fact, it has to run round three sides of a square in order to cross the Hindu Kush from Doshi to Charikar in the plain of Koh-i-Daman. The new road through the Salang tunnel will run along the fourth side of the square, and then Charikar and Doshi will be within an hour or so's distance of each other. Already



to-day they are close to each other as the eagle flies—that is, if the Paropaniscus does not justify its Avestan name by overtopping the ceiling of even an eagle's flight.

To-day we were bound, not for Kabul, but for Bamian; but, pending the piercing of the Salang tunnel, the same road still leads to both Bamian and Kabul up to the point, not far short of the Shibar Pass, where the Bamian River drops steeply down to join the Kundûz River. This is known as the Surkhab ('Redwater') locally in this upper part of its course.

Skirting the watersmeet of the Andarab and Surkhab rivers, we drove on up the Surkhab valley—first southward, then south-westward, then south-by-east. As the interminable valley narrowed and narrowed, I felt as if I were revisiting the eastern approaches to Petra, the rock-bound city south of the Dead Sea. But in these eastern approaches to Bamian the landscape of Petra has been reproduced on a gigantic scale. First, huge counterfeit square castles and round towers rose into view—built by Nature in horizontal courses of gorgeous-coloured strata: bands of purple, yellow, and blue. To checkmate an imaginary escalade, the titanic architect had constructed rows of palisades by standing some of the strata on end, in close-set ranks, just as if they were man-hewn beams of close-grained timber. Then, for mile after mile, we passed through a scale-model copy of the Syk—the slit in the mountain through which one enters Petra, coming from Moses' Spring. In the Syk there is room only for a horse; the Surkhab gorge carries a river and, side by side with it, a road that is traversable on four wheels; but the height of the cliffs is proportionate to the breadth of the gorge; so the traveller has the same sensation of being caught in a crevice through which there is just room for him to wriggle. Only twice, before we reached the confluence of the Surkhab with the Bamian River, did the valley open out for a few hundred yards at a time. Each of these vestibules was filled with a thick-set poplar grove, and these trees were auguries of the loveliness that lay ahead—supposing that the cliffs would give us passage.

When we deserted the Surkhab for the Bamian River, we found ourselves in a gorge that outdid the one that we had left behind. This gorge's rock-walls were higher; this river's boulder-bed was steeper; the tumbling waters lashed and foamed more furiously. By this time we had climbed nearly 5700 feet above the altitude of Pul-i-Khumri. Could this really be the approach to a miniature earthly paradise? But at last a point comes where the rock-walls relax their grip. A flat green field asserts itself, and then another and another, and, within less than a mile of the first field, Bamian announces its presence with a flourish.

A tributary, the Kalu, with room for green fields in its valley, here pours its waters into the Bamian River from the south. Up this valley runs a route—practicable for feet but not for wheels—which will eventually bring a biped, and even a quadruped, to Kabul after taking him across the headwaters of the Helmand River and over the Unai Pass. Above the watersmeet of the Bamian River and the Kalu, a purple mountain rears up, crowned by a purple fortress—line above line of purple curtain-walls and towers. This is Shahr-i-Zohak. It was founded (the archaeologists believe) in the sixth century of the Christian Era by the Western Turks, and it commands both of the eastern approaches to Bamian. In the days before road-builders had explosives at their service for blasting, the route up the Bamian River gorge, by which we had come, must have been barely passable for pedestrians, not to speak of four-wheelers. The approach down the Kalu valley, from the Unai Pass, must have been the one that gave the greater anxiety to the builders of Shahr-i-Zohak.

✓ Opposite the stupendous fortress, the Bamian River's valley is filled with a poplar-grove that must be at least a mile long. Then come orchards, and then wheat-fields. In the Bamian valley on the 15th May, the fruit trees were just beginning to blossom and the wheat was just pushing its way up out of the earth. At Nowshera, on the Peshawar plain, the fruit trees had been in full bloom at the beginning of March; and in Rajasthan in April the farmers had been threshing





XII. THE BAMIAN VALLEY





and winnowing the harvested grain. But the seasons at Bamian reflect the altitude: 8300 feet above sea level.

The valley goes on widening; and soon, along the face of the northern line of cliffs, the caves, scooped out by Buddhist devotees, begin. The array of caves grows denser as it leads up first to the lesser Buddha and then to the greater one. The lesser Buddha stands 35 metres high, the greater Buddha 53 metres. Carved out of the rock, and faced with stucco, they are ensconced in two vast arched niches.

I need not try to write even a summary guide to Bamian. Photographs, plans, and descriptions abound. You will be rewarded by a bird's-eye view if you climb to the summit of the Shahr-i-Golgola, the desolate 'City of Din and Hubbub' that commands the valley from the south at the valley's widest point. From this look-out place one can see two lines of high mountains, both still snow-bound on the 16th May in the year 1960. They run parallel to each other, approximately east-and-west. The northerly range, which is the lower of the two, towers above the bluffs that tower above the cliff that towers above the head of even the taller of the two colossal Buddhas. The southerly range—the Koh-i-Baba—is a link in the main chain of the Hindu Kush. The valley is rather more than 17 miles long, measuring from the gorge into which the river tumbles to the gorge out of which it bursts. This is the distance between the westernmost and the easternmost of the valley's flat green fields. The valley's breadth, at its broadest, cannot be much more than half-a-mile; over the greater part of its length it is narrower; but, in a wide wilderness of gorges and snow-peaks, this patch of flat fertile soil is an oasis sans pareil.

It is only since the recent introduction of mechanised four-wheeled vehicles that Bamian has been side-tracked. Throughout all the previous centuries and millennia since civilization began, every traveller between the Oxus basin and the Indus basin made his passage through Bamian. He not only passed through Bamian; he rested there. He rested for days, weeks, or months—in fact, for as long a time as he needed for recuperating from the first stage of his journey

and for bracing himself to embark on the second. After Buddhism had made its momentous passage across the Hindu Kush en route to Eastern Asia, it is no wonder that its votaries should have expressed their gratitude to Bamian by leaving those mighty marks of theirs on the inviting cliffs.

✓ The practice of Buddhism has been extinct in Bamian for perhaps eleven hundred years by now, yet the peace which the practice brought with it still reigns there. You will feel it if you look out across the valley in the moonlight. There is peace in the glistening white poplar-trunks. There is peace in the shadowy shapes of the Buddhas and the caves. As you gaze, this Buddhist peace will come 'dropping slow' upon your restless Western soul.

## 30. Re-crossing the Hindu Kush

IN our round-the-clock tour from Kabul to Kabul, Bamian was to be our last halting-place. From here, for a mechanised vehicle, Kabul is reckoned to be only one day's journey away. At Bamian, however, the would-be traveller to Kabul is still on the wrong side of the Hindu Kush, and we could not take our recrossing of the Hindu Kush for granted. We had not forgotten our experience in crossing the range from Herat to Qala-i-Nau. We had barely managed to scrape over the snow-bound Sabzak Pass. But the Sabzak is less than 8000 feet above sea level. The Shibar is 9800 feet. And the Shibar still stood between us and Kabul. So how should we fare on the Shibar?

Re-traversing the gorge of the Bamian River down to its junction with the Surkhab, we took, this time, the eastward road leading up the Surkhab towards its headwaters. Could any crevice be narrower and deeper than this one that is the meeting-point of two rivers and three roads? Who would guess that this has been an historic centre of communications? If the Surkhab gorge is as narrow as this down here,



how narrow is it going to be higher up? These qualms were not unreasonable; but, as so often in these parts, reason was outwitted by the surprisingness of the topographical facts. As we followed the Surkhab River up this, its highest, reach, the valley did not contract; it broadened out. The river dwindled to a trickle and then dried up, and we found ourselves running over a saddle between the snow-mountains. South of us rose the easternmost snows of the Koh-i-Baba; north of us rose the westernmost snows of the Salang link in the Hindu Kush chain. But on this saddle between them the soil was snowless and soft. It was cultivated up to the snow-line on either side. Then, abruptly, the saddle broke off, and we zigzagged down from its clear-cut eastern edge into a flat valley far below. Just as we reached the valley floor, a crack, only a few feet wide, opened in the rock-wall to our left and a rivulet tripped out through it. This was the Ghorband River. So we were over the Shibar Pass and had crossed the watershed between the Oxus and the Indus. Surely our troubles were now at an end. The snow-mountains were now behind us. Yes, they were, but they were still playing cat and mouse with us. They had let us through between their white paws. But they had commissioned the Ghorband River to plague us, and they had lent him enough new flood-water to do the job.

At the point where he trips through his crack in the crags and dances on down his level valley, side by side with the road, the Ghorband is a delightful stream. He might have been one of those brooks in the Lake District of England that sent the poet Wordsworth into raptures. Here, at the head of the valley, a lamb could have skipped across this little river without wetting its feet. Who could imagine that the Ghorband was capable of doing anybody any harm? Yet, long before we reached the valley's mouth and left the Ghorband behind us at the bridge on the road to Charikar, this deceitful rivulet had turned into a raging torrent. It was flooding the whole valley bottom, drowning the fields, and uprooting the trees.

It was its tributaries that had given the Ghorband the

strength to work this mischief. Right and left, they came trooping in, and there were enough of them to spare for wrecking the road. No less than sixteen of them had crossed our path before we were safely out of the valley, and each of the first two nearly brought us to a halt. In the first a lorry was sticking, with one wheel wholly submerged. The flood waters were tumbling round it and cascading over a precipice a foot or two beyond. Traffic was at a standstill. Queues of buses and lorries had piled up on either side. We saved the situation for these and for ourselves by lending the chain that we carried with us in case one of our two land-rovers should need the other's help. With the aid of our chain the immobilized lorry was hauled out; the ford was cleared; and the traffic started moving again. But the second of the Ghorband's runaway tributaries was nearly as obstructive as the first. Here a bulldozer was pushing downstream two large boulders which the torrent had deposited on the road, and, recoiling from these, it almost backed into us as we floundered past. This was a narrow escape for a flock of sheep, on the other side of us, that the shepherd was trying to entice into the ford by dragging a reluctant lamb into the water, ahead of its elders.

The other fourteen runaway tributaries were ineffective. But, even when we had passed Charikar and were bowling along the tarmac that runs all the way from there into Kabul, the resentful snow-mountains took a last fling at us. Collecting all the waters that they could muster from the Paghman range, they sent two more runaway torrents down to cross our path. But on a concrete-bottomed 'Irish bridge' a torrent is child's play. We sailed through, still unscathed, and, twenty minutes later, we were gliding under the arch crowned by the lion and unicorn. We were back at our starting-point. We had made it.



## 31. Feet versus Wheels

A STUDENT of the historic route-map of Afghanistan would have been well advised to do his work before the recent advent of mechanised wheeled traffic. And, if he has arrived too late for that, he would be well advised, again, to keep company with one of those caravans that still travel, not on wheels, but on feet. If he could persuade a seasoned caravan-conductor to initiate him into his lore, he would gain historical knowledge that no wheel-journey can impart.

The present-day wheel-road map of Afghanistan is the worst guide possible to the traditional foot-path map, and the foot-path map is the one that has made history. But this traditional map has been transformed, almost out of recognition, by the advent of wheels, and of the explosives that have made wheel-roads possible by blasting fairways through previously impenetrable gorges. The modern road-engineer finds the gorges tempting. They promise him gentler gradients and shorter cuts than the traditional tracks that wind up and over the hills; and, in his pride as an up-to-date technician, he feels confident that he can force a river to share its gorge with a road blasted out, or buttressed up, alongside the river-bed. Sometimes the engineer discovers, too late, that a highland river in a gorge is the most dangerous fellow-traveller that a road can have. He could have learnt this in advance if, before starting operations, he had thought of consulting one of those caravan-conductors who have been finding their way to and fro across Afghanistan since time immemorial. The caravans have learnt by experience to shun the river-gorges. They know that the worst of all the traveller's enemies is a gorge-bound river in spate. The roughest surface or the steepest gradient is a better option.

In the course of ages, the caravan-conductors have explored and utilized all the tracks over the mountains of Afghanistan that are traversable on foot. There is a multitude of these, and there is also a multitude of alternative

possible permutations and combinations of them. The practised conductor will plan his exact route *ad hoc*, with an eye to eluding the worst of the mud, snow, and flood-water that may be lying in wait for him here and there. But, when the means of locomotion degenerate from legs to wheels, and mechanised wheels at that, the traveller's range of choice narrows. A human pair of legs will carry its owner almost anywhere. And, where a man can go, he can usually coax a donkey or a camel into following him. But even a mule is brought to a full stop by a four-feet-high perpendicular rock-face, which a man can clamber up or down with ease. And most of the choices of alternative routes that are open to a mule or a man are ruled out for a land-rover. Even with its high clearance, four-wheel drive, and powerful engine, a land-rover cannot pick its way through a dump of boulders or face even a twelve-inch perpendicular drop or rise. A land-rover demands at least some pretence of a road to cheer it on its way. But a land-rover deserves its name by comparison with a luxury car. Set out from Kabul in a Rolls Royce or a Lincoln, and the end of the tarmac at Charikar will be your limit. In other words, Afghanistan will be closed to you.

If one is trying to reconstruct the traditional route-map, one must begin by ignoring the present-day road-map and, *a fortiori*, the future one. It is significant that, even on the present-day map, neither Bamian nor Bagram lies on a trunk-road. Bamian is now on a side-road, kept in repair for the benefit of tourists; Bagram is on no road at all; it is virtually impossible to reach Bagram on wheels. Yet, throughout all but the latest phase of the history of civilization, Bagram and Bamian have been the two chief traffic centres for travellers across the Hindu Kush. All routes have passed through one or other of them, and most routes through both. We know this, thanks to the testimony of the monuments and the records, but we could never guess it from the present-day map of roads that are practicable for mechanised four-wheelers. For the historian, this map is worse than useless. So throw it away and take to your legs. For the historian in Afghanistan, to be pedestrian is the beginning of wisdom.



## 32. The Minar-i-Chakri

I WAS leaving Afghanistan without having set eyes on the minaret at Jam. This is a sister of the Qutb Minar at Delhi, and each of them once towered above a capital city. The Ghorî Empire had two capitals: one at Delhi, in conquered Hindustan, the other at Jam, in the conquerors' native highlands that constrict the upper valley of the Hari Rud. Today, there is still a Delhi. It is one of the great and growing cities of the present-day world. But Jam now has nothing but its mighty minaret left to proclaim what it was in the twelfth century of the Christian Era. In the later age of the Timurid renaissance, Jam was also the home-town of the last of the classical Persian poets. Jami is buried at Herat, but he came from the place whose name he bears.

I had planned to visit Jam, and had eventually renounced my plan in a moment of despicable common-sense. The journey to Jam is an arduous one—especially in the spring, and this in a year of unusually late and heavy rains. If I had attempted this expedition I should have had no certainty of reaching my goal, but I should certainly have deprived myself of a desirable pause in a three-months' course of otherwise continuous hard travelling. Having opted for the pause and having consequently recovered from my fatigue, I was inconsequently cursing myself for having thrown away an opportunity when I received a note from Monsieur Schlumberger. Had I seen the Shevaki stupa and the column called the Minar-i-Chakri? If I had not, would I like him to take me to see them? Here was an unexpected consolation for what I had lost. Here was also an act of great kindness, since the scholar who was offering to give me so much of his time was, I knew, a very busy man. I accepted with gratitude, and we set out at 5.30 a.m. on a crystal-clear morning: no clouds, no mist, no dust-haze.

The stupa stands at the foot of the first mountain-spur that is climbed by the Khurd Kabul caravan-track from Kabul to

Jallalabad. The column is planted conspicuously on the ridge. The track itself is interesting. It was the main route in the days before the advent of wheels. When we had crossed the flooded Logar River and had driven as far towards this day's destination as a land-rover's wheels could carry us, we took to our feet, mounted the slope running up to the stupa, admired the beauty of the stupa's diaper masonry, and then started to climb towards the column. From below, this looked near as the crow flies; but, as a man climbs, it proved to be far. It took us, in fact, four hours to go up and to come down again. Fortunately a steep mountain-side is easy, each way, on one part of one's body. On the way up it is easy on the feet; on the way down it is easy on the lungs. A breeze made us unaware that the Sun's rays were cooking our skins, and springs of pure water welled out of the rock to quench our thirst. So the petty rigours of the climb were mitigated, and, anyway, this climb was richly rewarding.

The Minar-i-Chakri is an enigmatic monument. It is on the grand scale—about sixty feet high, I should say at a guess. The masonry is in the same diaper style as that of the stupa below, and this diaper-work suggests, though it does not prove, that both monuments were built in the Kushan Age. Whatever the date of the column may be, it is a child of the marriage of Greek with Persian architecture. The capital is reminiscent of Persian capitals of the Achaemenian Age, such as one sees at Persepolis. The Greek element in the column's parentage is represented by the triple bands of decoration—entablature, frieze, and cornice—that surround the column at intervals. Who erected this great column on these rugged heights? What did its erection signify? It must have cost a vast expenditure of labour. So presumably it commemorates some important person, human or super-human, or, alternatively, some important event, historic or legendary. The puzzle presents itself but remains unsolved.

As one stands on the ridge, at the base of the Minar-i-Chakri, one finds the majesty of this work of human art surpassed by the one thing that can surpass it: the majesty of the landscape. Looking downwards to the mountain's foot,



we can now see that the stupa to which we paid our respects on our way up is one of a series planted in a semi-circle on the foothills. From our present altitude we can also make out the ground-plans of some of the monasteries with which the stupas were associated. To our left, at a higher level, we can spy another column springing from the summit of a conical monticule. In the plain beyond the foothills, the dark green belt of trees that hides the Logar River marks the location of Old Kabul, now buried, beyond the reach of the archaeologist's spade, under a deep deposit of alluvium. But my eyes cannot rest on the foreground or even on the middle distance, where a pattern of dark hills demarcates the basins of Kabul and Paghman and the Koh-i-Daman. My eyes are drawn irresistibly to the line of glorious snow-mountains that extends, without any visible break, from end to end of the immense horizon.

At the right-hand end (we are facing north-north-west) towers the highest mass of all: the snow-crown of Nuristan, whose east and west shoulders had given me glimpses of themselves from the plain of Peshawar and from the western foot of the Khyber Pass, before I had gained my first view of the whole crown from the Lataband. The left-hand end of the line is the eastern rampart of Afghanistan's central highlands. It hides the Hazarajat, and, beyond that, Ghor, jealously guarding the minaret of Jam. In the centre, glistening pure white against a pure blue sky, we can see the nick that is the Salang Pass. It is the highest but shortest passage between two worlds, the basins of the Indus and the Oxus. To the eye gazing out from the base of the Minar-i-Chakri, it looks as if the great white wall were not only unbroken but straight. But this is a magnificent optical illusion. The true configuration is in the shape, not of a straight line, but of a T-square; and the two lines that form this right-angle are broken by other and deeper gaps than the nick made by the Salang. I myself, a few days back, had profited by one of these now invisible breaks in the snow-line. I had passed out of the Oxus basin into the Indus basin over the Shibar Pass without meeting even a fleck of snow on the rolling saddle

between the snow-peaks. Gazing hard, I can now make out, from where I stand, a brown ridge running down to the Koh-i-Daman plain on this side of the white horizon. It is the southern rim of the Ghorband valley, down which we had dropped from the Shibar Pass to Charikar. And then, between the Salang nick and the crown of Nuristan, the white wall sags and lets down its guard. That must be the watershed between the Panjshir and the Andarab, and my eye, travelling eastward along it, could have espied the Khawak Pass if this had not been screened by the west shoulder of the Nuristan snow-crown.

What a spectacle! It would be glorious, even if these noble mountains were as innocent of human history as the Canadian Rockies. But, standing here at the high-perched base of the Minar-i-Chakri, I am seeing frozen history—the history of at least half the Old World. In that white mountain-wall the echoes of history have been preserved in snow, as, in Siberia, the bodies of mammoths have been preserved in ice.

I must tear myself away. And now, on the steep descent, I must perforce switch my eyes from the serene horizon to the slippery rocks and rolling stones beneath my steeply descending feet. The tortured strata have been reared up, by some antediluvian convulsion, from a horizontal to a vertical stance. The mountain bristles like a hog's back. Not even a goat, I say to myself, could find pasture here. And, just as I say it, I catch sight, below me, of a pair of camels, and then of another pair and another. Lying at ease on beds of rock-bristles, these indomitable fellow-creatures of mine are vigorously chewing the cud. In Afghanistan, Nature is tough, but life is tougher.



### 33. Watersmeet

THERE it was at last under my eyes: the famous watersmeet at the southern foot of the Hindu Kush. For years past, I had been poring over this point on the map and trying to convert those unrevealing conventional lines into a picture in my mind's eye. Sometimes I had pictured this meeting-place of Asian waters in the likeness of one in England that I knew well. I had made the Rawthey do duty for the Panjshir, and the Lune for the Ghorband; and this mental transposition had called up an image of waters tumbling steeply to join each other in a pool surrounded by a shingle-bed. Sometimes, again, I had pictured two flat-flowing English rivers—Cherwell and Isis—meeting undramatically in a setting of open green water-meadows. The map had allowed me this wide choice of imaginary pictures. For there, on the map, were mountain and plain at close quarters. But the map seldom gives one an inkling of the reality. What I now saw below my feet was strikingly different from all the alternative pictures that I had imagined.

I was standing on the rampart of a ruined citadel on the brow of a bluff; and, below, a huge volume of water was swirling past and sweeping over the lower ground on the opposite bank. The watersmeet that fed this mighty flow was just to my left; and no wonder that the flow was mighty. For each of the two rivers that met here had taken a partner on its short run from the foot of the mountains to this trysting-place. From the crown of the rampart I could see, in a row, the mouths of the four valleys from which the four rivers had burst out; and three valleys out of the four led up to passes: the Ghorband valley to the Shibar Pass, over which I had travelled a few days back; the Panjshir valley to the Khawak Pass; and the Salang valley to the pass that bears its name. The whole panorama was spread out before me. Standing on this bluff, on the south-west side of the hurrying waters, I was still in Koh-i-Daman: 'the Mountain-

Fringe'. The lovely dark green country between the farther bank and the southern foot of the Hindu Kush was Kohistan: 'Mountain Land'. The citadel on whose rampart I was perched was the northernmost point of the ancient city of Kapisha, whose ruins are known today as Begrám. The walls of the city itself ran over rising ground behind me.

At the moment at which I climbed the rampart and caught my first view of the waters, a raft, towing a swimming horse behind it, put off from the opposite shore and made for ours. Since the beginning of history there must have been a ferry here; for this is the highest point at which all the waters descending from the Hindu Kush into Kohistan can be crossed in one single transit. The raft spun round this way and that as it was carried down-stream by the racing river. It was all that even those practised ferrymen could do to berth it on our side under the shelter of a rock below the bluff; and the roughness of the raft's passage demonstrated that the citadel of Begrám had been planted in a key-position. The rampart on which I was standing commanded the ferry completely. Post a dozen archers here, and no hostile force could venture to attempt the arduous crossing.

The crossing that I had just witnessed had been unchallenged. The passengers had landed. The swimming horse, too, was now ashore. But still I lingered and went on gazing. In the backwaters and lagoons on the river's shallow farther side, flocks of big white birds were standing. They were standing as stiff as sentries, taking no notice of the human bustle within much less than a gunshot's distance away from them. Their placidity was not surprising, for these were not the living birds that they pretended to be. They were dummies, planted there to decoy real birds of passage.

In the migrating season, hordes of birds from India approach the Hindu Kush at this point, en route for the cooler climes in which they prefer to spend their summers. Age-long trial and error has taught them, as it has taught their human fellow-migrants, that here, if anywhere, the mountain-wall can be crossed. It can be crossed on the wing, as well as on foot, if only the mountains are not in a malignant



mood. But in some years the mountains send down, from their still unmelted snows, a north wind—the dreaded Bad-i-Parvan—which blows so hard and strikes so cold that neither bird nor man can make headway against it. When the Bad-i-Parvan is blowing, the Hindu Kush is truly higher than the ceiling of even an eagle's flight. And the migrant birds' distress is the fowlers' opportunity. Defeated by the adverse blast, the poor birds seek shelter where they see the deceptive dummies apparently standing secure. And then they make easy targets for the waiting fowler's gun.

Tearing our eyes away from the swirling waters and the motionless counterfeit birds on the waters' brink, we moved up from the citadel on the bluff to the city on the rising ground behind, to visit the famous Room No. 10. Here the French Archaeological Delegation had discovered the Begram treasure, neatly deposited on the floor behind the vestiges of a door that the depositor had locked behind him. But by this time my eyes, reluctantly detached from the watersmeet, had riveted themselves on the Koh-i-Pahlavan: 'Paladins' Mount'.

This isolated little mountain overhangs the river a short distance below the watersmeet and on the same side of the water as Begram. It is a dwarf compared to the towering Hindu Kush, but its isolation makes it a conspicuous landmark in the Koh-i-Daman plain. On the first day after my arrival in Afghanistan, I had gazed at it, across the plain, from the terrace at Istâlif, and had then tried to reach it from Charikar—only to be thwarted by a broken bridge when I had come within what looked like no more than a bow-shot's distance away from it. Today I was at last within reach of it, with no obstacle in between, and I was eager to be there; for I knew that the riverside flank of this mountain was the famous Shotorak.

Shotorak: 'Baby Camel': Professor Kohzad gave me an explanation of its name. The mountain drops sheer into the rushing river; and, as one picks one's way round its shoulders and peers down at the waters racing below, the waves on their surface look like the woolly hair on a baby camel's back.

To-day the wind was blowing strong, and the waves on the water were matched by waves on the wheat-fields at the river's edge. The whole landscape was in wavy motion. The Shotorak was justifying its name.

What magnet had drawn us to the rugged path, winding round the Koh-i-Pahlavan's shoulders, from which we were viewing the wind-blown landscape down there below? On one shoulder after another there lay the remains of a Buddhist monastery: a cluster of miniature stupas, with a row of cells for the monks. The most romantic of these dead monasteries is the Shahzade-i-Chin: 'The Chinese Princes'. It is, in fact, the place where a clutch of distinguished Chinese hostages was held, in honourable confinement, by the Kushan emperor Kanishka. The emperor is said to have paid his prisoners the compliment of sharing their monastery-prison with them for a month. He might well have been tempted by the ravishing view of river and field and orchard and mountain that unfolds itself when one stands within what were once the noble Chinese hostages' prison-walls. If ever I am condemned to be interned, I shall beg leave to serve my term on this spot.

The rushing water was breaking against a rocky foot that the mountain had thrust out provocatively into the stream. The silhouettes of Bagram citadel and Bagram city stood out on the sky-line. The Sun was bright; the breeze was fresh; the scene was entrancing. But the mountains grudged us more hours of this beatitude. They sent down a dust-storm, and the landscape that, a moment ago, had stood out so clear, was shrouded in a trice. The curtain had been rung down on a stage on which so many dramas had been played over the course of so many centuries. It was a signal that it was time for us to take our leave. But the dust-clouds that veiled the mountains could not blot out those memorable chapters of human history.



## 34. Coming Down

AT the last roundabout, going east in Kabul city, we put our question to the traffic policeman. 'Tang-i-Garú or Latab-and?' The gorge-route from Kabul to Jallalabad takes only half as much time as the mountain-route if the gorge-route has not been temporarily closed by the violence of its fellow-traveller the Kabul River. Coming up, forty days back, I had had to take the mountain-route at Sarobi, where the ways divide. To-day the policeman said 'Tang-i-Garú'. So, this time, we followed the river till it dived into a gorge, and followed it on—zigzagging, through tunnels, down the mountain-side—when the river, not content with diving, went over the edge of a precipice and dropped down perpendicular. Here we came down with a run, and we went on descending till the gorge suddenly opened out to our left and the river as suddenly doubled in volume. The Kabul River had been joined by the Panjshir. Two days before, I had seen the Panjshir collect the waters of three other rivers and swirl past the foot of the Koh-i-Pahlavan en route for Nijrao and Tagao. Now it had forced its way past the monuments of Buddhism in both these lands, and had hurled itself into the river with which I was keeping company. In a moment we were at Sarobi, and, from here to Torkham, the road was familiar.

I now recognized, in reverse order, each of the wounds, inflicted on the road by the river in flood, which had threatened to bring our lorry to a halt on the day on which I had come up. By this time the flood had subsided, and to-day we were coming down with the river instead of provoking him by mounting in the opposite direction to his furious downward course. Taken this way, the Kabul River was not so intimidating. Yet, when we had passed the last darband before Jallalabad and had rolled on, past the last of the cliffs, into an open plain, I felt like a mouse that had slipped out from between a wild-cat's paws.

Here, at Darunta, the Kabul River is joined, from the south-west, by the Surkhab, and the ancient route from Jallalabad to Kabul runs up that way. It is only the modern civil engineer who has had the audacity to lay his road alongside the gorge-bound stretch of the Kabul River instead of steering clear of it. In our four-wheeler age the ancient route is no longer frequented, but, like the Via Appia in the Roman Campagna, it is adorned with monuments that bear witness to its former primacy. The angle above the junction of the two rivers is sown thick with Buddhist stupas, and at Nimla, higher up the Surkhab valley, there is the Mughal emperors' garden, where they used to rest before breasting the Khurd Kabul pass.

Nimla was too far off my beat, but I paused to visit one of the stupas that stood up conspicuously out in the plain. It looked as if it were only a stone's-throw away from the nearest point to which a land-rover's wheels could carry us, and I was in a mood to decline an old man's proposal to guide me to it. I soon had cause to be thankful that I had not, after all, been too proud to accept the grey-beard's kind offer. Irrigation channels, flooded fields, concealed streams, and baby canals kept on opening up treacherously beneath my feet; and, as my guide steered a course for us and skipped nimbly across each successive obstacle, I followed him floundering and crest-fallen. The old man led me not only up to the elusive stupa but on to its summit, up a ramp of ruinous rubble, and the view from the top was worth the fatigue of the scramble. The southern horizon was bounded by the Safed Koh, and this range was earning its name—the White Mountain—by still wearing an unbroken crest of snow. To the north we could see the outlying snow-peaks of Nuristan.


The next morning was my last in Afghanistan. I was reluctant to leave this beautiful country and hospitable people, so I lingered at the unrewarding Buddhist ruins at Hadda. But I had signalled to my friends on the Pakistan side of the frontier that I was going to meet them at midday, so now we sped on eastwards over road-metal and tarmac. Soon, on our



left, the Kabul River decamped from the plain and plunged into another gorge—the gorge from which it emerges at Warsak on Pakistani ground. On the westernmost spur of the northern mountain-rim of the Khyber Pass, the familiar Pakistani fort came into view. Here was Torkham; here was the frontier chain. It was lowered, and, as I crossed it, I felt like Kinglake when he crossed the River Save from Austria into Turkey. As my Afghan companions took leave of me within a few yards of the dividing line, I remembered the Imperial-Royal hussar who had bidden Kinglake as solemn a farewell as if the Save had been the River of Death. Like the Save River in the eighteen-thirties, the Torkham chain today divides two worlds that are as far apart from each other as if they were sundered by an ocean's breadth. But the present-day Afghan-Pakistani frontier is a stranger tour de force than the nineteenth-century Austro-Turkish one. On both sides of the barrier the same Muslim religion is professed and the same Pashtu-Pakhtu language is spoken. Yet the two states whose territories this frontier delimits are not on good terms with each other. So great is the power of politics to make mischief.

### 35. Happy the Country . . .

AFGHANISTAN has been deluged with history and been devastated by it. History has swept over the country in a long series of cataclysms; and these have been as destructive as the annual spates that sweep over, and obliterate, the Afghan roads. Afghanistan's mountains have allowed her people to preserve their independence—or, at any rate, to recapture it whenever it has been momentarily lost. The Hindu Kush is a giant, yet, in the sector where history has broken through his defences, he is only half the height of the mountains that seclude Gilgit. These are some of the highest mountains in the World; and, thanks to them, Gilgit has



enjoyed the happiness of having no history—no history, that is, to speak of until just the other day.

Gilgit's past is almost a blank. Her people must once have been Buddhists before they became Muslims. Her eastern neighbour Ladakh is still Buddhist today, and her western neighbour Afghanistan was Buddhist till the ninth century of the Christian Era. The Buddhist chapter in Gilgit's unrecorded past could be inferred from the geographical facts, even if it were not attested by the vestiges of a colossal Buddha-figure carved on a cliff above the watersmeet at Kargah. When was Gilgit converted to Buddhism? When was it converted from Buddhism to Islam? No record survives of either of these two momentous events, and even the more recent history of this sheltered country was comparatively uneventful down to the year A.D. 1947, in which the British Indian Empire and its dependencies were partitioned. From that year onwards, Gilgit has been immersed in the stream of history, and has not been the happier for having had this belated experience of mankind's common lot.

In 1947 the outgoing British government at New Delhi assigned the Gilgit Agency to the state of Kashmir. This decision was perhaps in accordance with the geographical facts of the day. For at that time the road which kept Gilgit in touch with the rest of the World for a few months in the year was the fair-weather road running up to Gilgit from Srinagar. Anyway the British decision was put into effect. Representatives of the ruler of Kashmir arrived in Gilgit and took control. But the Kashmiri regime in Gilgit was short-lived. The Gilgitis are Muslims; the ruler of Kashmir was a Hindu; and the Gilgitis have been more successful than their Kashmiri fellow-Muslims in shaking off Hindu rule. With the aid of her mighty mountains, Gilgit made a bloodless revolution. She overthrew the ruler of Kashmir's administration and flung herself into the arms of Pakistan. The Gilgitis then discovered that they were living in the Air Age. Gilgit was now involved in the war over Kashmir between Pakistan and India; and, since the Indian armed forces were unable to get at Gilgit on the ground, they bombed her from the air.



Gilgit was bombed more or less continuously during the last six months before the cease-fire.

The return of peace did not bring with it the disappearance of aircraft from Gilgit's cramped skies. The Indian air-bombardment was now replaced by a Pakistani air-lift, and this is still continuing today, twelve years after the end of Indo-Pakistani hostilities. To-day, Gilgit is as dependent on air-borne supplies as West Berlin was when the Russians blocked the ground-routes. The ground-routes leading in and out of Gilgit are blocked both by Man and by Nature. The Pakistanis have built a jeep-road from the plains to Gilgit on their side of the armistice-line, to replace the road from Srinagar that has remained in Indian hands. But this road, too, is open only for a few months in the year. The Pakistanis are now building a new road which is to be chiselled out of the flank of the Indus gorge. This new road will be open all the year round, and then Gilgit will be fully in the World for the first time. Meanwhile, the air-lift is Gilgit's life-line. In favourable weather the Dakota freighters fly in, one after another, unload, reload, turn round, and fly out again.

The flight from Rawal Pindi airport to Gilgit air-strip takes little more than an hour to skim over a host of giant mountains through which it would take one's feet a fortnight to thread their arduous way. The audacious plane begins operations in an off-hand way. Rising from the ground, it just clears the first trees and telegraph wires. Then it just clears the first foothills. As it goes on lazily mounting, the hills become greener and at the same time more thickly populated. There will be a roof or two and a field or two on the crown of the steepest ridge. Then Man fades out and the forest takes over. Then the forest fades out and the snow takes over. Through the floor of the plane, the chill strikes cold up one's legs. The plane, lazy as ever, is flying as low over the snow peaks as it dares. It may be lazy, but it must have done some climbing; for those mountains that are now beneath us are of no ordinary height. They seem low only because they are out-topped by the far higher mountains that are towering

up on either side of us. We are now flying in a trough, and at the bottom, far down below, a ribbon of water is hurrying in the opposite direction to ours. Can that really be the Indus in its gorge? It looks no bigger than the Lune below Shap. We cut a corner, hoisting ourselves, still lazily, over a gigantic snow-clad mountain-shoulder. We are now flying along another trough—a still narrower one. An equally narrow valley comes in from the right. It is the Hunza River joining the Gilgit River. A flash of green—a patchwork of fields and groves—opens out below us. It suddenly rises to meet us. Good lord, we must be coming down. It looks like an impossible undertaking, but in a moment it has been achieved. Our wheels have touched the ground again. What a pity that this thrilling flight should so soon be over. What a blessing to find ourselves once more on *terra firma* with unbroken bones.

## 36. The Jeep Road to the Roof of the World

WHEN you have crossed the Gilgit suspension-bridge and have turned up the Hunza Valley, you are heading for the Pamirs and for Sinkiang. But, even today, a jeep will not take you the whole way. Eventually the jeep-road will turn into a pony-road, the pony-road into a yak-road, and the yak-road into a foot-road. I took no more than a taste of even the jeep-road. We followed it, out of Gilgit, for about 40 miles, till it brought Rakaposhi into view. Rakaposhi stands 25,550 feet high, and it has a lovely shape—as individual as that of a living body. After sighting Rakaposhi, we turned back. But those first 40 miles have given me a notion of what the rest of the way must be like.

The Hunza River behaves as most rivers do in a gorge. It flings itself against one precipice and, rebounding from it, hits the opposite precipice; and it repeats this alternating



movement any number of times. At each place where the river lashes round a precipice's foot, there is no room for a road at river-level. The only way of making a road here is to scoop it out of the precipice's face. And no limit is set to the height at which the road-cutter is to apply his chisel. He studies the whole face of the cliff from top to bottom, and he will choose the least unfavourable altitude, however high this may carry the road above the valley-bottom.

This road is designed for jeeps, and for nothing even just one size bigger. The overarching rocks have been cut away just high enough to clear a travelling jeep's roof. The roadway has been built out just wide enough to make room, between the upper and the lower precipice, for a jeep's two pairs of wheels. The road's outer edge is carried on dry-stone walling. The lowest courses are laid, Heaven knows how, on the merest vestige of a ledge. Where even this is lacking, a beam is laid between one slightly projecting rock and another, and the dry-stone courses are founded on that. Where there is no foot-hold for beam-ends, a wooden bridge is thrown across the abyss, to join one stretch of dry-stone with the next. One cannot see the structure of the road immediately below one's advancing wheels, and ignorance is bliss. Unfortunately the road twists and turns round the cliff's gnarled face; and, at some points, this gives one a broadside pre-view of what is coming to one within the next few seconds. When it does come, and the bridge-boards clatter and sing as the jeep trundles over them, one's heart is in one's mouth. It is a relief to find oneself borne up again by a dry-stone wall, even if its foundations are exiguous.

When jeep meets donkey, they must feel their way past each other at one of those rare points at which the road has a foot or two's surplus width. The most dangerous donkeys are those that are coming down to Gilgit with a great beam of wood slung on either side of the pack-saddle. When they turn sidewise in a fit of nerves at the jeep's approach, the beams swing ponderously across the road. They are ponderous enough to sweep a jeep over the edge if they were to give it a slap on the cheek.

What happens when jeep meets jeep on this single-track jeep-way? Well, we had the experience. Just, but only just, after we had surmounted the highest and most hair-raising hump of all, we sighted, ahead of us, some way down below, another jeep travelling in the opposite direction. At that sight, our driver did the right thing: he accelerated. We dashed across a shingle-ledge over which a waterfall was gushing out of the foot of a miniature glacier, and so managed, just in time, to draw in at a point where we could leave room for the approaching jeep to pass us.

What would have happened if our two jeeps had met half a mile farther back? I can think of only one solution. We should have had to draw lots, heave the losing jeep over the brink, and let its crew crawl through between the winning jeep's wheels (jeeps have a high clearance). They could then have continued their journey alive, though on foot.

It is difficult to describe the Hunza Valley jeep-road without making it appear to be more dangerous than it really is. But no description could do justice to the dangerousness of the pony-road which the jeep-road has recently replaced. When, at the turning-point of our journey, I had taken my fill of gazing at Rakaposhi, my eye was caught by a set of scars up aloft on the flank of the precipice on the opposite side of the river. 'What is that?' 'Oh, that is the old pony-road, now fallen out of use.' Try to imagine it: the fifty days' journey along that cornice from Srinagar to Kashghar. The pioneer explorer of those ledges ranks with the pioneer navigator of the seas. He, too, must have been built of *robur et aes triplex*.

## 37. Ten Miles Short of Chitral

FOR months past, Chitral had been on my itinerary. There it was: 'Chitral, 9th-10th June'; and I had assumed that this entry was a fixture. But it proved to be no such thing when, on the 29th May, I re-emerged from Afghanistan to travel



along the Pakistani side of the frontier according to plan. Chitral? Well, on the 28th May, there had been a heavy fall of snow on the Lowarai Pass, which is the only way into Chitral from Pakistan. Who could tell how long the pass would remain snow-bound in this exceptional year of late bad weather? I had depressing news from an officer of the Air Force Command at Peshawar. He had flown over the Lowarai Pass and back a few days ago; and, from what he had seen below his plane, he guessed that the pass would remain closed for many weeks to come. The Registrar of the University of Peshawar spoke more comforting words. He was sure that the pass was open. He had sent a package of examination-papers over it into Chitral, just about the time when the Air Force officer was making his pessimistic appreciation.

The Registrar's information raised my hopes—but raised them unwarrantably, as I was to discover later on, when I had come within nearer range of my baffling objective. A Chitrali porter, trudging through the snow, could have carried on his head a packet of examination-papers, but not an examiner or an examinee. Papers could travel, without having to exert themselves, where a human being must risk life and limb. Porters, carrying loads, do cross the Lowarai Pass at all seasons, but in the bad season they do not take the hazard with impunity—and the bad season extends over eight months of the year. In the bad season there is a fifteen-miles-long stretch of continuous ice and snow. The torrents that pour over the road up there freeze into glaciers. If one is caught in a blizzard anywhere along these murderous fifteen miles, one's fate is sealed. Last year alone there were 60 or 70 deaths on that stretch; and last year was not an exceptionally bad one, as this year is.

Not only porters made the hazardous transit. Early in May this year the retiring Additional Commissioner, Chitral, came out, a sick man. On the 9th May, his successor went in. In the same month an officer of the World Health Organisation went in and came out again. Halve my age, and I might have had a shot at doing what these men had done. But, at

my age, the only possibility would be to fly. An Air Force freighter? It could not land. Two-seater single-engine Harvard trainers? Hardly safe. A Cessna could do it, and there is one in Western Pakistan, but not to spare. So, for me, Chitral was out. But at least I could get within twenty miles of the pass that marks the border between Chitral and Dir. Everyone agreed that there is an all-weather road to Dir town that is traversable by an ordinary car. Dir town is twenty miles or less from the head of the pass, and on the 12th May the U.K. Deputy High Commissioner, Peshawar, and the Pakistan Assistant Political Officer, Chakdarra, had struggled four miles on beyond Dir town. When their jeep was stopped by road obstructions, they had continued on foot in the teeth of an icy wind, till human endurance gave out. Well, I should be in Dir town on the 7th June, twenty-six roasting-hot days to the good. Perhaps I might get a little farther. That would be a poor consolation prize for losing my race with the weather for Chitral, but it would be interesting to get even just a taste of this rough passage.

From the terrace of Amandarra rest-house, I could see, in the moonlight, the bridge across the Swat River, upstream, and Chakdarra fort crowning its crag on the farther bank. Twice I had passed the south end of that bridge, travelling eastward. Tomorrow, for the first time, I was to cross the bridge and travel north. The view from Amandarra rest-house must be one of the loveliest in the World. The fortified crag on which the rest-house stands overhangs the take-off of the Malakand Canal from the Swat River. The canal runs south, through a tunnel under the Malakand Pass, to generate hydro-electric power and to make the fortune of Mardan by irrigating its once parched plain. The river vanishes westwards into a gorge, to collect the waters of the Panjkora and then break out of the mountains to Abazai. Above the gorge the Swat River meanders in many channels; and it has so much water to give that, even in June, the valley is still green.

The north end of Chakdarra Bridge is the beginning of the road to Dir. This road starts sloppily, splashing through the



shingle-beds of two streamlets without bothering to take itself across them on bridges. You would think it was a kaccha road, not leading to anywhere in particular. Actually, it is the all-weather road to Dir and the fair-weather road to Chitral over the Lowarai Pass. It is a vital line of communications, not only for Dir State, but for Pakistan. The Government of British India built it; the Government of Pakistan maintains it. Wherever this key-road does need a bridge or a culvert or a retaining wall, it is granted, in full measure, all that it requires. One's respect for the road increases, the nearer it brings one to the Lowarai Pass.

This road to Dir and Chitral first crosses the watershed between the Swat River and its north-eastern tributary the Panjkora. Then it runs up the Panjkora valley. Finally it swerves to the left and runs up a tributary of the Panjkora that bears the same name—Lowarai—as the pass and as the mountain below whose left shoulder the pass runs. The watershed itself is not impressive. It is just a low divide between the heads of two side valleys. But, when the northward-running valley narrows into a gorge and the road swings away and up over the shoulder of a mountain, the northward view from the top is a grand one. At one's feet, far below, lies the Panjkora valley, with the river racing down it south-westwards. To the left rise the jagged mountains of Bajaur. This wild country is included in the Malakand Agency, and its people come out, when they wish, through Chakdarra to see the World. But no British official was ever allowed to enter Bajaur, and no Pakistani official, either, has gained admittance there yet. Across the Panjkora valley, towards the north, the mountains lie within the state of Dir, up to a range that marks the frontier between Dir and Afghanistan. Like the mountains in the foreground, this range is snow-less in June; but, above its crest, two snow-covered mountain-masses just emerge. The mass on the left is the snow-crown of Nuristan. The mass on the right is Lowarai Mountain.

These snow-caps hide their heads again as one drops down into the Panjkora valley. But there is one point on the way up

to Dir town at which Lowarai Mountain reappears, and at this point one can see the pass as well. There it is, that snow-clad nick below Lowarai Mountain's snow-clad left shoulder. The top of the mountain stands about 12,000 feet high above sea-level; the nick comes down to 10,450 feet; and then, to the left of the nick, the mountain rises again. On that side it does not rise so high, and it soon descends south-westwards to below the snow-line. In this month of June there must be many snow-free passes across this range, south-west of snow's-end; like the Lowarai Pass, they would lead a traveller from Dir out of the Panjkora basin into the Kunar valley; but they are all politically out of court. In terms of political geography, they would lead from Dir, not into Chitral, but into Afghanistan.

Panjkora means 'Five Districts'. Each of the five is a valley ploughed by a river whose waters are rushing to join the main stream. Oleanders in blossom fill the torrent-beds; groves of wild olive-trees cover some of the nakedness of the rocky hills. It might be a landscape in Greece. High up, the mountains are terraced and cultivated wherever there is a patch of soil to be saved and used. We turn up the Lowarai valley, sight Dir town, with the Nawâb's fortified palace dominating it, and run on through the bazaar and out of town again. We are to stay in the upper guest-house, and that is three miles to the good if our objective is to get within as close a range of the pass as the season will allow.

The upper guest-house is the end of the all-weather road for ordinary cars. When one sits, under tall plane-trees, on the lawn perched on a mountain-side, the Lowarai Mountain's snow-cap seems only a stone's-throw away. It overhangs the lawn and dominates the scene; but from the rest-house one cannot see the pass, which displayed itself so clearly on the way up. Should we see it again—and this time at short range—if we went on up the road as far as a jeep's wheels and our own feet would take us?

Transferring from car to jeep, we started out with the A.P.O. to see whether we could come nearer to the summit than the point reached by him and the D.H.C. twenty-six



days back. We reached and passed the point where their jeep had been brought to a halt. We then reached and passed, still on wheels, the point beyond which their feet could carry them no farther. The road-mending gangs had been active. They had rolled the fallen rocks back towards the mountain-side just far enough to make room for a jeep to edge its way between rock-fall and precipice. We crawled on and up in hope; but, before long, we were overtaken, in our turn, by the inevitable fate of jeeps on this road at this season. A mighty rock, dropped in the fairway, had left no room between itself and the crumbling road-edge for even a jeep to squeeze through. We took to our feet, and saw no reason why feet could not carry us up to the snow-line.

Dir State adjoins Afghanistan, and its mountains are made of the same crumbly stuff as its neighbour's. An un-metalled and un-tarmacked mountain-road is consubstantial with the mountain out of whose flanks it is dug. And a road made of this raw material, in its after-winter state of dilapidation, is execrable for wheels but excellent for feet. A trickle of water can plough across it a furrow deep enough to break a jeep's axle. But feet stride over such furrows without noticing them, and step out buoyantly over the road's soft surface. We went on gaily, suffering no distress from the gentle upward gradient, till we came out on to a shoulder above a side-valley. 'This,' said the Nawâb's retainer, 'is the half-way point between Dir town and the head of the pass.' Looking ahead, we could see, across the side-valley, our road mounting another shoulder and then running away and away till, on the horizon, it reared up over Lowarai Mountain's white shoulder, as a Greek mule rears when he has to mount a rock. If that was not the head of the pass, what was it?

Gujar Post, our guide informed us, was only three miles from where we were standing. Gujar Post is the last possible halting-place before Ziarat, which is far down the precipitous north-western slope. Gujar Post is only six or seven miles from the top. An impulse seized me. Why not make a dash for the snow-line? It cannot be more than five or six miles off, and we have a nearly full moon to light us on our

way down again. I marched on briskly, eager to turn the corner and start climbing the stretch of the road on the opposite flank of the side-valley. But I had forgotten one decisive fact. In Panjkora there is no valley without its river; and, as we approached the hair-pin bend, the Mena River came rushing out of the mountains and tumbling across the road into the valley below.

The river was obstreperous, but looked fordable. Surely one could cross it along the ledge where the road ought to have been. I had rolled up my trousers and was taking off my shoes when the Nawâb's retainer made a representation. 'Sir', he said, 'you are quite hot with walking in the sun, and the water of this river is icy-cold; it comes from snow, just up there. If you wade in it, straight from your hot walk, you will catch a chill; your stomach will be upset in the night; and then what will the Nawâb say to me?' The retainer had played a trump card; for it is no joke for any subject of the Nawâb's to incur the Nawâb's displeasure. I hesitated, and instantly the retainer's partner, Common Sense, showed her hand. I was seventy-one; it was 6.00 p.m.; the next stretch of the road, beyond the Mena River, was steep; and the total climb, within those next ten miles, must be at least 4000 feet, for the Mena ford could not be more than 6000 feet above sea level, if it was that. Yes, my opponent held all the cards; I had lost the game; I admitted defeat, and turned back.

Sitting on the rest-house lawn that evening, I saw the snow-cap of Lowarai Mountain fade away as the Sun set, and shine out again as the Moon rose. Our taxi-driver and the Wali Ahd (the Heir Apparent of Dir State, who was hospitably entertaining us) were having a lively conversation with each other in Pashtu (both men were Yusefzai Pathans). I think they must have been talking about second-hand cars. Next morning, at 10.30, I was at it again. The unattainable snow-mountain had fascinated me, I could not take my eyes off it. Suddenly two young men dropped down on to the lawn out of the blue. They looked as fresh as if they had just awoken from a long night's sleep. But they had an air of



exhilaration that is not worn by late-risers. Actually they had risen at 4.30 that morning at Drosh, the southernmost town in Chitral, and they had come over the Lowarai Pass by various means of conveyance. Where the road had been jeepable, they had jeeped. Where the road had been traversable by hooves, though not by wheels, they had ridden. Where the glaciers across the road had made hoof-holds precarious, they had walked. Where there had been a precipitous short cut, they had been towed down a snow-slope (and, I suppose, up the opposite one) on a mattress. One of these intrepid young men was the Additional Political Agent, Chitral; the other was the Medical Officer, Chitral Hospital. The A.P.A. was on his way to a conference at Peshawar. 'Lahore 114 in the shade; Peshawar 115,' Radio Pakistan announced while we were having lunch. After courting death by freezing at dawn, the A.P.A. was going to court death by heat-stroke before dusk. A jeep would hurry him from the one deadly peril to the other, all in one day.

The A.P.A. and the Medical Officer had been spirited; the Chitrali porters are heroic. A difficult and dangerous enterprise does call out human nature's immense reserves of courage and endurance. But is this hazardous Lowarai journey really necessary? Chitral, unlike Gilgit, is not blocked for eight months in the year by Nature. If there were no such things as states, frontiers, and feuds, Chitral could be reached with ease from Peshawar any day in the year. It could be reached via Jallalabad. For, at Jallalabad, the Kabul River is joined by the Kunar River; and Chitral is simply another name for the upper Kunar valley. Unseal the sealed frontier that cuts this valley in two like a travel-proof bulk-head, and that grim annual toll of deaths on the Lowarai Pass could be remitted. Unhappily, politics here comes into play. 'Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.' For 'religion' write 'nationalism', and you will have named the Moloch of our age. When shall we stop sacrificing human lives to political fantasies?

## 38. Dir and Swat

Dir and Swat states do have some things in common—and important things too. They are two out of the five surviving autonomous states within the frontiers of Pakistan. The other three are Chitral, Nagar, and Hunza. All the rest have been 'integrated'. Bahawalpur and the khanates in Pakistani Baluchistan are no longer to be found on the administrative map. But Dir and Swat states are still there; and they are also linked with each other in a more intimate way. The subjects of both states are Pathans of the Yusefzai tribe; and to persuade Pathans to become the subjects of anyone except themselves is an almost miraculous feat of statesmanship. In both states the regime is one of personal government by the ruler. But, beyond that, the differences between the two are striking.

Dir State is at least 300 years old. It was already in existence when the Mughal regime was at its zenith; yet it never fell under Mughal suzerainty. Swat State was established within living memory (between 1917 and 1926, to be precise). The founder is still alive, though he abdicated in favour of his son some years back, in order to devote the rest of his life to the practice of religion. Swat State was founded as an act of defiance against Dir State's claim to sovereignty over the Swat valley. Though the new state was eventually recognised by the British Indian Government, and consequently by the Government of Pakistan as the British Indian Government's legal successor, it has never been recognised by the Nawâb of Dir; he still styles himself 'the Nawâb of Dir and Swat'. The policy of Swat State is liberal: it spends all that it can on hospitals, roads, and schools, in that order of priority. The policy of Dir State is conservative. A hospital has recently been built at the capital, but the road which is Dir State's main artery is maintained by the Government of Pakistan. In Dir State the buses that ply on the British-built and Pakistani-serviced road are a state monopoly. In Swat



State the transportation business, like all other business, is left to private enterprise. In Swat State you can pick up the telephone receiver and speak (if you can get through) to anybody anywhere in Pakistan or in the wide world. Dir State, too, has a telephone network, but it is insulated. If one of the Nawâb's subjects wants to talk to anybody outside the state boundaries, the Nawâb will want to know the reason why, and, if the call is sanctioned, it will have then to be relaid at Chakdarra from the Dir telephone network to the Pakistani one. Finally—and this explains much of the contrast between the two states—Dir State is poor and Swat State is rich.

The fertile fields of the Swat valley have no counterparts in the Panjkora basin. In the Swat valley they harvest two crops a year: a wheat crop in June and a rice crop in October. There are rice-fields in Dir State too, but they are rare and tiny. Swat State is rich because it exploits all its natural resources. The timber of its kohistan is almost as profitable as the agricultural produce of its valley-bottoms. Swat State is as rich as it is capable of being—except, perhaps, for the possibility of generating hydro-electric power from its mountain-torrents. Dir State, too, has a kohistan with a valuable stand of timber on it. But Dir State's wealth in timber has, so far, remained untouched.

This catalogue of contrasts might seem to work out wholly in Swat State's favour. What, then, is to be said for Dir State, by comparison with its brilliant upstart neighbour? Well, the personality of the reigning Nawâb of Dir<sup>1</sup> is an asset that cannot be ignored. His rule is personal with a vengeance. Nothing escapes his suspicious eye, and he does not need to raise his voice when he gives an order. Even though he speaks under his breath, he can count on being obeyed. And to secure obedience is the alpha and omega of his policy. His aim is power, and he aims at it straight and steadily. The reality of power is, for him, the substance; the appearance of modernity would be, in his eyes, a shadowy vanity of

<sup>1</sup> This was written before the change of rulers in Dir State in October, 1960.

vanities. Scorn, scepticism, and suspicion would work together in his mind to deter him from making concessions to the passing fashions of the dangerous world outside his mountain frontiers. Perhaps his neighbour and younger contemporary, the reigning Wali of Swat, would agree with the Nawâb of Dir in declining to sacrifice power to modernity if he were driven to make a choice between the two; but this is a dilemma that he knows how to elude. The Wali recalls, to an historian's mind, one of the enlightened monarchs of eighteenth-century Europe. In the pre-revolutionary age of European history there were many European principalities of the size of Swat that were governed autocratically to the advantage of the people.

The Chief Secretary of Swat State would also have found himself at home in an eighteenth-century European setting. Years ago, before the founder of the state had completed his work of state-building, the present Chief Secretary came, at the founder's invitation, to serve as tutor to the present Wali for a term of three months. He was a stranger from the Panjab; his home-town is Gujranwâla. He had accepted this temporary tutorship because he thought that three months among the Yusefzai Pathans would be an interesting experience. It turned out to be more interesting than he could have imagined. He came for three months; he has stayed for life. When the three months were up, the founder asked him to stay on to be his right-hand man. At that time the prospects of the state that the founder was building were still obscure. But the young Panjabi put his faith in the Yusefzai statesman's rising star, and his faith has been justified by the outcome. From that day to this, he has served first the founder and then his successor, the reigning Wali, in all their manifold undertakings. His is an exacting job. He has never been away from his post for more than a fortnight on end. He has never travelled beyond the frontiers of Western Pakistan. But he has had a hand in conjuring a modern state out of Pathan anarchy; and that is a life-work that has been worth while.

But all other contemporary figures in Swat and Dir are



overshadowed by the personality of the founder of Swat State. Like his neighbour and former opponent the Nawâb of Dir, this man of genius comes from a clerical family. He is, in fact, a grandson of the famous Akhond of Swat. In the Ishmaelitish Pathan world, hereditary men of religion have sometimes derived a political advantage from their military impotence. Equally balanced armed factions among the laity have been able to agree on appointing a cleric to serve as a conciliator between them. If submitting jointly to the sway of some third party is recognised as being the least among alternative evils, they will opt for the clerical conciliator who possesses the minimum of power; and, if the cleric chosen to play the part is also a statesman, this is his opportunity. The founder of Swat State came into power in this way; and so, a century and a half earlier, did Ahmad Shah Abdâli, the founder of a greater Pashtun empire.

The call that came to the Akhond's grandson had been a not uncommon one in the Pakhtun tribes' history. But how did this child of a traditionally anarchic society ever conceive the idea of using, as he did, the modicum of power that had been conferred on him? How did he become aware that such things as modern states existed? How did he come to realise that the World's history had reached a point at which a modern state had come to be one of the necessities of Pakhtun life? All that his unruly clansmen in the Swat valley had expected of him was that he should give them just enough military and political unity to enable them to hold their own against the aggression of the Nawâb of Dir. But the founder of Swat State saw far beyond that. And he not only saw beyond. He also saw in advance the successive steps that would bring him to his goal without arousing the suspicions of the clansmen whom he was planning to turn into his subjects. The whole plan was conceived in the mind of one solitary man. He can have had no confidant till the present Chief Secretary turned up. To conceive, plan, and execute this fantastically difficult political enterprise was a work of genius. I ventured to ask him how he had achieved it. His answer was the one word 'patience'.

The founder not only conjured a modern state out of a political chaos. When he had completed his work and had consolidated it, he abdicated like Diocletian (of whom he has perhaps never heard). Since then, he has reverted to his family profession. The regimen that he set himself, after retiring from public life, was to keep an all-the-year-round Ramadan fast, eating and drinking nothing during daylight hours and spending all his time on reading the Qur'an. Doctors' orders have now moderated his fasting, but his concentration on Holy Writ continues.

As he reads, what is passing through his mind? Patience was, I am sure, his master-instrument for the building of Swat State; but he could not have carried the work through if he had not supplemented patience with ruthlessness when the moment came for removing opponents who had been threatening to block his path. Is he atoning, in his retirement, for past acts which the precepts of Islam do not sanction? And, if so, in what sense do these ruthless acts call for remorse and repentance? Could Swat State have been conjured out of Pathan anarchy without the deliberate taking of Pathan lives? And was it wrong to purchase the happiness of a people at this price? Undoubtedly the establishment of Swat State has brought happiness to those Yusefzai Pathans who have become its subjects. By one man's act they have been rescued from their immemorially old traditional anarchy and have been given peace, prosperity, and an initiation into the ways of a modern world whose rising tide is lapping round the mountain-ramparts of their fertile valley. What are the rights and wrongs of the founder's conduct during his extraordinary political career? The answer to this question lies between him and God. Perhaps it is being hammered out by spiritual travail as the old man sits reading the Holy Book.



## 39. Rice and Snow

No snow, no rice. The rice-fields of the Kurram valley are irrigated with snow-water from the Safed Koh: the White Mountain. A few days back, I had seen its snowy crest from the opposite side, when I was coming down from Kabul to Peshawar through Jallalabad. At Thal, where one strikes the Kurram River when one is heading for Parachinar from Kohat, the valley is bare and even grim. But, as one travels up it, Nature relents; the valley relaxes; and human skill and industry seize their opportunity. As the valley opens out, every bay is terraced and watered—for rice, if the soil will bear it, or, as a second best, for maize and wheat. The terracing here is almost as elaborate and as beautiful as it is in Bali, and in Pakhtun-land this devotion to agriculture is surprising. The Balinese are a peaceful race, and their spirit is reflected in their imprint on the landscape. But the Pakhtuns have been men of war since the beginning of their recorded history. They have been notorious for spending their money on weapons and their time on blood-feuds. The terraced fields up the Kurram valley reveal a different side of their nature.

This different side—the pacific and constructive side—is being worked upon deftly by the Pakistan Government authorities. I arrived in Parachinar on the last day of the annual agricultural show. The scene might have been laid on the outskirts of some small town in the English Lakes, except that the Safed Koh, which towered over the sports ground, is immeasurably grander than the Lake Mountains. The riders competed with the same ardour; the prize-winners wore the same complacent air on their faces as they paraded their prize beasts: humped cattle, fat-tailed sheep, and gigantic Panjabi goats. What an excellent outlet for Pakhtun pugnacity. The establishment of this show was a stroke of statesmanship; and it is something that is of more than local interest, considering that pugnacity is one of the common traits of human nature all over the World.

The authorities are, in fact, trying to divert the tribesmen's thoughts from feuds, and their energies from fighting, by opening their minds to the possibility of improving the quality of their agricultural produce. They are persuading them to take to a finer breed of rice and a choicer breed of apples. They are educating them to appreciate the value of fertilisers by distributing these to them at a subsidized price. They are leading water to potentially fertile land that has been barren only because it has been dry. This is uphill work. Farmers everywhere are inclined to be conservative. The traditional obsession with blood-feuds dies hard. All the same, the tribesman's outlook on life is slowly but surely being transformed.

If only the feuds between states could be put to sleep as successfully as the feuds between tribes and clans. Unhappily, international tension is being keyed up, all over the World, by the spread of the infectious Western mental disease of nationalism, and the Kurram valley bears the marks of it. The valley is cut by a frontier. The head of the valley belongs to Afghanistan, the rest of it to Pakistan; and, along the man-made dividing line, pairs of forts grin defiance at each other. The frontier runs over the top of the highest and loveliest peak of the Safed Koh.

The Safed Koh glistens in the sunlight. Down below, the valley is golden with the corn. In the highest fields the crop is still standing; in the lower parts of the valley it has already been reaped and stacked in sheaves round the threshing floors. But the stubble-fields are as rich in colour as the uncut crops. The flooded rice-fields gleam like silver mirrors. In the Kurram valley, Man has cooperated with Nature to make the World beautiful. Only those opposing pairs of forts introduce a jarring note. They bear harsh witness to the sinister side of human nature. We are sons of God possessed by a devil. Which of these two contending spirits in us is going to prevail?



## 40. Razmak and After

TO-DAY I have seen something that an archaeologist would give a fortune to see. I have seen the Roman Wall, not as it is in 1960, but as it was in the fifth century, only thirteen years after the Romans had evacuated it.

Imagine yourself a citizen of what was left of the Roman Empire round about the year 425. You may fancy that you are Synesius of Cyrene or, if you like, Priscus of Panium. You are making a tour of those parts of the Empire that the Imperial Government has abandoned within your life-time; and your travels have now brought you to Ultima Thule: the farthest frontier of the Roman Empire's Romano-British successor-state. The Romano-British Government is still holding on to the two ends of Hadrian's Wall; but it has evacuated the difficult middle section and has handed this over to the custody of the local Picts. It has enlisted a few of them as its own paid caretakers to keep an eye on the derelict installations. This has happened only thirteen years ago, so the fortifications and the barracks are still almost intact. A wall has collapsed here, a roof is off there, and some doors and windows have gone. That is all the damage up to date. But the bushes and briars that are invading the streets and the parade-grounds give a pre-view of what is to come. They forebode the state of dilapidation to which the Wall, and the forts that are strung along it, will have been reduced when the wreckful siege of battering days has had fifteen centuries more for doing its work.

Chesters, Housesteads, Corstopitum; Damdel, Gardai, Razmak. This morning—the 15th June, 1960—I travelled from Miranshah Fort to Razmak and back along the famous Razmak road. North-east of Razmak, Pakistan still holds the British-built fort at Miranshah; south-west of Razmak it still holds the British-built fort at Wana (I am writing now in Wana Fort, three days later). But, when independence and partition arrived simultaneously in 1947, one of the first acts

of British India's new-born successor-state Pakistan was to evacuate the chain of forts that the British Indian Army had thrown across the intervening highlands. Damdel, Dosalli, Gardai, Razani, Razmak: on our journey to Razmak we came upon the ruins of each in turn. All are weird; but the weirdest, the biggest, and the highest up is Razmak, which was our terminus.

Picture to yourself Aldershot transplanted from England to Pakistan but retaining its English climate, because it has been perched on a plateau 7000 feet high, with mountains 10,000 feet high overhanging it. Then picture to yourself this expatriated Aldershot lying desolate and decaying. The decay is not yet far gone, because the place was built to last. It is built of solid masonry with corrugated-iron roofs. The church, the cinema, the shopping centre, the workshops, the officers' quarters, the barracks; they are still well preserved; but the only building that is still occupied and used is the tehsil (the local administrative office). The avenues of trees still line the principal streets, but the roadways themselves are already half-overgrown with sumac bushes.

As a going concern, Razmak had a short life. By 1947, when it was evacuated, the oldest building cannot have been standing for more than 25 years, and the youngest not for more than 15. In this last chapter of British Indian military history, Razmak was the summer headquarters of a divisional command which spent its winters at Dera Ismail Khan down on the plains, on the west bank of the Indus. But this was no ordinary division. It was six brigades strong. In fact, in summer-time the British Indian military population of Waziristan must have been more numerous than the Wazir and Mahsud tribesmen.

The building and maintenance of these vast installations and the provisioning of this number of troops in this inhospitable and hostile country, at so great a distance from their sources of supply, had been a severe strain on the finances even of a politically united Sub-continent with the resources of the whole British Empire behind it in case of an emergency. When independence brought with it partition



and the war in Kashmir, Pakistan found herself quite unequal to the task of holding, in the extravagant British way, the frontier that she had inherited from a united British India. She met this problem by promptly evacuating the remoter forts, posts, and roads. But financial stringency and military commitments on the new frontier between Pakistan and India were not the only reasons for Pakistan's partial withdrawal from some of the positions on the North-West Frontier of the Sub-continent that the British had established and maintained at so high a cost. This negative reason for withdrawal was reinforced by a positive one. Pakistan deliberately took a new departure in policy. She decided not to treat the frontier problem as a military problem first and foremost. And, as a consequence of this bold and imaginative change of policy, the tribesmen whom these British-built frontier-defences were intended to hold at bay are not now behaving like the Picts in the fifth century. They are behaving like the Scottish highlanders in the eighteenth century. Instead of becoming saboteurs of civilization, they are becoming converts to it.

In taking this constructive new departure, the Pakistani regime has had two advantages that the previous British regime had lacked. It has had the advantage over its predecessor in date and also the advantage in religion.

By 1947, when Pakistan took over the responsibility for the North-West Frontier, the tribesmen had been in contact with the modern world for nearly a hundred years. It is true that the contact had mostly taken the form of hostilities; but, even when people meet in combat, they learn something from each other. By 1947 the tribesmen's minds were just beginning to open themselves to modern ideas. This opening was, so far, no more than a crack, but it gave the Pakistani authorities an entry which they could gradually enlarge. In the second place the Pakistanis were the tribesmen's co-religionists; and no fakir could stir up the tribesmen against them by denouncing them as infidels. After all, the Pakistanis had proved the sincerity of their adherence to Islam by insisting on the establishment of a specifically Muslim

successor-state of the British Indian Empire; and those of them whose homes in the Sub-continent lay outside the frontiers of Pakistan had proved their sincerity doubly by pulling up their roots and sacrificing their homes and their property for the sake of living under a Muslim regime. In Pakistan today the agnostic is often surprised by finding that a Pakistani who, in other respects, is 'modern' and apparently sophisticated is, in his religion, strictly orthodox and even fundamentalist. (The same incongruous combination of incompatible attitudes has also been characteristic of nineteenth-century English and twentieth-century American evangelical Protestants. At Wana Fort, I listened to an entertaining conversation between a Pakistani agnostic and two fundamentalist Lutheran American lady missionaries.) A common religion made it possible for the Pakistanis to approach the tribesmen with gifts in their hands without incurring the suspicion which the tribesmen had felt towards British unbelievers, even when these were offering them the benefits of civilization.

Under the present-day Pakistani regime the frontier problem has not, of course, ceased to be a military one altogether. Pakistan still maintains a considerable military force on the frontier, though this on a much reduced scale and not as part of the regular army. Military precautions are still punctiliously observed. The forts and posts that are still held are vigilantly guarded; convoys on the road are escorted (sometimes by low-flying planes, as well as by lorry-loads of scouts); fighting among the tribesmen is firmly put down, and attacks on the Government's forces and installations would meet with a vigorous and effective reply in kind, delivered with weapons more modern, and therefore more deadly, than the now obsolete weapons of the antediluvian British Age. But the military side of the frontier regime is kept in the background. The para-military frontier forces, which are recruited from among the tribesmen themselves, have become partly devices for providing employment and partly educational institutions. Their strict discipline and smart turn-out has, in fact, a valuable educational effect. Pakistan



does pursue a forward policy on the frontier, and a vigorous one, but its key-instruments are not weapons of war; they are dispensaries, hospitals, schools, sports, and, above all, economic development. This last instrument is supremely important, because it gives the tribesmen opportunities for finding alternative means of livelihood to the raiding which has been their traditional recourse.

When you travel through the tribal areas on the Pakistan side of the Durand Line, you notice that the more warlike tribes occupy the poorer lands, while the richer lands are held by people who, in military prowess, are no match for these redoubtable warriors. The Daurs, for instance, are no match for the Northern Wazirs; yet it is the Daurs, not the Wazirs, who possess the fertile green strip in the upper Tochi valley. The Bannúchis are still milder than the Daurs, yet it is they, and not the Wazirs, who possess the Bannu oasis, which far surpasses the upper Tochi valley in fertility and greenness and extent. Why have the Wazirs left their timid neighbours in possession of the choicest bits of country? Why have they submitted to being confined to their own naked barren rocks? This question suggests a paradox, but perhaps the question itself has been wrongly conceived. Perhaps one should start by asking: Why is it that the Wazirs today are more warlike than the Daurs are? This question arises because there is no reason to suppose that these two kindred Pakhtun tribes differed appreciably from each other in degree of military prowess at the date, whatever that may have been, when they both crossed the watershed between the Helmand basin and the Indus basin in order to conquer new homes for themselves on the Indus basin side. The present difference between them in martial valour can perhaps be explained by the difference in the nature of the land that the two tribes happened to acquire at the time of the conquest. It seems reasonable to guess that the nature of the land accounts for the present tribal characteristics of its occupants. The present tameness of the Daurs can be explained as being a consequence of the goodness of the land that has happened to fall to their lot. This good land has

provided them with a livelihood in return for hard work; and this remunerative hard work of a peaceful kind has kept them busy and has left them no time, and no incentive, to spend their energies on fighting either each other or their neighbours. Conversely, the present fierceness of the Wazirs would be a consequence of their bad luck in having stumbled on the bad lands at the time when the tribes crossed the watershed. On these lands they have not been able to make a living by peaceful labour. In order to live, they have had to rob either each other or, more profitably, their less indigent neighbours. There has been nothing but fighting to occupy their minds and employ their energies. So the nakedness of their land would explain the Ishmaelitish way of life that they lead today. If this diagnosis is correct, it suggests that the Pakistan Government has hit the nail on the head in concentrating its efforts on giving the tribesmen new economic openings. What the Government is aiming at is, in effect, to transform Wazirs into Daur, and Daur into Bannúchis. And, if it has been true in the highlands that a tribe's character has been a product of the nature of that tribe's lands, then we may anticipate a revolutionary change of manners and outlook and ambitions when the highlanders are given openings down on the plains.

I arrived at Miranshah Fort just in time to watch a football match between Scouts and 'locals' (Scouts in white, 'locals' in chocolate and yellow). The game was played with skill, vigour, and good humour. And, each time that the two parties play football with each other, they become that much less likely ever to start shooting at each other again. The 'locals' tribal supporters had been invited inside the fort to back their team. Sometimes the tribesmen are invited in to tea, and are entertained with a seemingly unpremeditated display of the Frontier Corps' newest weapons.

At the time of the change of regime in 1947, education on the frontier was still in its infancy. The Pakistan Government's British predecessors ought not to be blamed too severely for this. To try to force education on a suspicious and unwilling people would be to invite failure. In the



British Age the time was perhaps not yet ripe. But it did ripen simultaneously with the political change, and the Pakistani educational authorities have taken full advantage of the new opening. The tribesmen have now become eager to have their sons educated, and the number of primary schools for boys in the frontier region has trebled or quadrupled within the last fifteen years. Ask Mr Hashim, who was educational officer in the tribal districts for several years before he became Registrar of the University of Peshawar. Middle schools and high schools have been added, and a beginning has been made with education for girls.

The emancipation of women is still a controversial, and indeed explosive, issue in the tribal areas on the Pakistan side of the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier. When you meet a group of local 'maliks' ('kings' only in the sense in which the title is given to the Ithacan notables in the *Odyssey*), they are apt to begin by telling you that this is something that is contrary to the commandments of Islam, and that it is being forced upon the unhappy pious Muslim women of Afghanistan by the pressure of Russian Communist infidels on a misguided and unrepresentative Royal Afghan Government. It may be true that in Afghanistan in 1960, as in Turkey in the nineteen-twenties, the pace of modernisation is being forced to some extent by a government which is sincerely convinced that rapid and radical modernisation is the only alternative to national downfall. Yet, if the maliks on the Pakistan side of the Durand Line could make a trip to Kabul, they would be disconcerted by observing the obvious contentment of the women who have recently come out of purdah there. And they would get the shock of their lives if they ever visited Karachi, or even Lahore. In Kabul the number of emancipated women is still a handful; in Karachi it is legion. A glimpse of the Pakistani intelligentsia's life in Karachi would shatter the tribal maliks' fond dream that, in adhering to Pakistan, they have identified themselves with an Islamic country that is as puritanical as, say, Sa'udi Arabia.

When I asked a group of maliks at Fort Sandeman what

their own women's views were, they answered truculently that they neither knew nor cared. Their women's future was not the women's business; it was for the men to decide. Yet I ascertained afterwards that some of these self-same maliks were actually sending their daughters to the Fort Sandeman high school for girls. The maliks themselves admit, when pressed, that emancipation is bound to come sooner or later. They reduce their demand to a plea that it should be allowed to wait until it is accepted freely and voluntarily.

A few days later, I was being entertained for lunch at Chaman, the farthest post on the Pakistan side of the frontier on the road from Quetta to Qandahar. One of my hosts was the colonel of a battalion of the Panjabi Regiment that happened to be stationed there. The colonel was the son of a Mahsud khan; he had become a modern soldier. His little daughter, six years old, was at table by his side. She was wearing a Western child's clothes: blouse, belt, skirt, socks, and smart dark spectacles. She intends to become a doctor. Whatever the maliks may say, or her own father for that matter, this child is undoubtedly going to insist on growing up into an utterly modern woman. In fact, the social and cultural change in Waziristan in the short span of two generations beginning in 1947 is going to be as great as the corresponding change in the Scottish highlands was during an equally short period beginning in 1745.

What transformed the Scottish highlands was not just butcher Cumberland's weapons and General Wade's roads. It was the opening-up of new and better economic opportunities for the crofters: a farm on Cape Breton Island or a job in a factory in Glasgow. A comparable economic revolution is transforming the life and outlook of the Pakistani highlanders today. On the Razmak plateau, for instance, the Government is encouraging the Northern Wazir tribesmen to make the most of their local economic assets. There are now markets for their excellent potatoes and excellent wool. There are opportunities for the Pathan tribesmen to take up holdings of fertile land in newly irrigated areas in Sind. And there has been something like a mass-movement of Mahsuds from



Southern Waziristan to Tank at the foot of the mountains. The departure of the former Hindu business community in 1947 left an economic vacuum in Tank, and the Mahsud highlanders have filled it eagerly and competently. As for the Northern Wazirs, they are acquiring land irrigated by water from the Kurram River at the upper end of the great oasis of Bannu. On the Pakistan side of the frontier the Pathan highlanders' way of making a livelihood is, in fact, changing all along the line; and this economic change is bringing with it a change in outlook. The tribesmen are in course of being captivated by their Pakistani fellow-countrymen's civilization.

The Pakistani tribesmen find this civilization attractive; they also realize that their bread is buttered on the Pakistani side; and this makes them at present impervious to appeals to them, from beyond the border, to regard the Pakhtu-speaking parts of Pakistan as being an Afghan *terra irredenta* called 'Pakhtunistan'. If Pakistan had only her next-door neighbour, Afghanistan, to reckon with, one could predict with some confidence that the Pathan highlanders on the Pakistan side of the Durand Line would eventually become fully integrated citizens of Pakistan, like the Scottish highlanders in present-day Great Britain. The process of integration is voluntary: it is not only the policy of the Government of Pakistan; it is acceptable to the tribesmen whose way of life and outlook are being transformed. But there is an unknown quantity in the situation that gives anxiety to the Pakistani political authorities and the tribal maliks alike. Beyond and behind Afghanistan lies the Soviet Union. This mighty power professes itself to be Afghanistan's friend, and, in the picture of the Afghan Government as Pakistani eyes see it, these Russian professions are being accepted at Kabul at their face value. Suppose that Kabul were to accept an offer from Moscow to put the Soviet Union's propaganda-machinery and economic resources at the Afghan Government's disposal for making an all-out effort to win over the Pakhtu-speaking tribal population on the Pakistan side of the Durand Line. Would the Pakistani Pathans' loyalty to

Pakistan be proof against the temptation to change sides to which they would be exposed in these new circumstances? This is a question that troubles the Pakistani authorities at the back of their minds. It troubles them in spite of their conspicuous current success in applying their enlightened frontier policy.

## 41. Posteens and Loin-cloths

At the ragged eastern edge of the Iranian Plateau, where it drops steeply down to the Indus plain, the extremes of climate meet abruptly, with no gradual transition to soften the impact of the change on human stamina. At one moment you are shivering in a posteen (a sheepskin coat with a heavy embroidered lining); a moment later you are sweating in a loin-cloth. There can be nothing else like this in Nature; it is matched only by some of Man's ingenious devices. This borderland is, in fact, a natural Turkish bath on a gigantic scale, with the chilly room, at an altitude of 7000 feet and upwards, opening straight out of the steamy room at 3000 feet and under. The intervening altitudes would, no doubt, be agreeably temperate if you were not carried through them in a trice from one extreme to the other. The sensation is like what one suffers in doing business in Washington or New York in the height of the summer, when one is perpetually alternating between air-conditioned buildings and the unmitigated blaze of the Sun out of doors.

Sitting at a rare temperate altitude above Dir, I had admired the intrepidity of the Additional Political Agent, Chitral, and his companion the Medical Officer. In the small hours they had made their way over the glaciers that were still bestriding the Lowarai Pass; before sunset they were going to be enduring a heat-wave down in Peshawar. I myself ran into the same heat-wave on the same plain a few days later, before I could escape to the upper Kurram



valley. Parachinar nestles up against the southern foot of the White Mountain. In the second week in June even the southern face of this tall range was still crowned with snow, and in the circuit-house at Parachinar I enjoyed the luxury of refrigerating myself in a dank English drizzle. (The English flowers in the garden were evidently enjoying this as much as I did.) Yet, the very next day, as we re-descended the valley, the rice-fields signalled to us that we were passing out of England's climate again into Java's. At Thal it was sultry; and, when we crossed the Kurram River here and made our entry into grim Waziristan, the heat-rays ricocheted like molten cannon-balls off the naked rocks.

Should we get through to Miranshah? That would depend on the present depth of the Kaitu River at Spinwam ford. (There had once been a bridge there, but the Wazirs had blown it up and had paid for their spree, ever since, by having to wade in all weathers, instead of crossing dry-shod, on their way to and from Thal market.) The prospect of being brought to a halt by flood-waters in this bone-dry sun-baked land might seem bizarre; but the risk was a real one; for the self-same Sun that was roasting the rocks might have swollen the waters of the river by melting the snows on the mountains of Afghanistan. If the Kaitu blocked our way, we should have to return to Thal and resign ourselves to making a one-hundred-and-forty-miles-long detour from Thal to Bannu via Kohat. (There is no direct road between Thal and Bannu through the gorge along which the Kurram River forces its way between these two places.) So we breathed a sigh of satisfaction when, dipping down at Spinwam into the River Kaitu's bed, we found the water barely wetting our tyres.

Mir 'Ali Fort was as sultry as Thal; Miranshah Fort was temperate; abandoned Razmak was as English in its climate as Parachinar had been; and the mountains overhanging it were furry and green with the rudiments of a forest-fleece. But the day after that, travelling from Miranshah to Kalabagh, was like plunging down from the Lebanon into Arabia. As if Mir 'Ali were not sultry enough, we went on

down, and down again, towards Bannu. Just as we reached Arabian level, we staved off our coming tribulations by diving into the great Bannu oasis. Here a canopy of tree-tops keeps the Sun at bay. In the green shade down below, one is as cool as in the palm-groves of Hofuf in Al-Hasa. The area of the Bannu oasis is being extended by new irrigation-works at the point where the Kurram River and a tributary of the Kurram's tributary the Tochi break their way out of the hills into the plains. But even the biggest oasis is no more than a fleck of green on the face of the desert; and, as one runs on south-eastwards from Bannu, the trees gradually thin out and then give way to wheat-fields which, in their turn, become mangier and mangier on their way to turning into naked gravel. It is scorching hot at Darreh Tangi, where the Kurram's and the Tochi's united waters, en route to join the Indus, force their way through the last obstructive line of hills. It is hotter still in the Isa Khel country, on the road from Darreh Tangi to Kalabagh. But the sight of Kalabagh makes one forget that one is being roasted alive. It must be one of the loveliest, as well as sultriest, spots in the World.

Picture to yourself, first, a symmetrical semicircle of mountains. These are not beautiful in themselves. They are squat and bare and grey, and the stuff that they are made of is more like mud than rock. The beauty lies in the scene for which they provide the setting. At the midpoint of the semicircle, a narrow gorge expands abruptly into an ample plain, and out of this gorge a mighty river bursts and instantly spreads itself a mile wide. You can see it spreading still wider as it dips out of view over the southern horizon. And no wonder that the Indus has been impatient to dilate himself. It is a long way to Kalabagh from Attock, and over all that distance the Indus has been travelling in a strait waistcoat. The only previous stretch of his course along which he has been able to flow at ease and to give his arms free play has been the stretch, far up-stream, running to Attock from Amb. At Kalabagh, at last, the Indus can claim the elbow-room that his vast volume requires. As he breaks out of the gorge into the plain he visibly rejoices, and Kala-



bagh town visibly rejoices with him as it watches this entrancing spectacle without ever wearying of it. The little town rises steeply—tier above tier—from the river's right bank up the riverward flanks of a detached chain of miniature hills that have found standing-room between the river's bank and the semicircular mountain-range's foot. There could not have been a better-chosen spot for feasting one's eyes on the sight of the river joyfully regaining its freedom. But, scaling the mountain overhanging the river's opposite bank, at the point where the waters break out of the gorge, I gained a view of Kalabagh itself and of the reflexion of its tiers of houses on the Indus's expanding surface, besides a long vista of the river broadening and broadening on his way towards the still distant ocean.

From Kalabagh to Tank the road was as torrid as it had been from the outskirts of the Bannu oasis to Kalabagh. But, west of Tank, we mounted and mounted and mounted again till, in the shade of the poplars and plane-trees of Wana Fort, we found ourselves once more in the temperate climate of Miranshah. The respite was brief; for the run from Wana to Fort Sandeman deprived us of the benefit of the altitude by smothering us in whirling clouds of dust. Who could have guessed, that morning, that, the next afternoon, at Ratgora, we should be sheltering from a thunder-storm in a rest-house surrounded by a forest of age-old juniper trees? At Ziarat, that same night, we were thankful, at 8000 feet, for woollen sweaters and piles of blankets.

It was a two-thousand-four-hundred-foot drop from Ziarat to Quetta, and Quetta's vaunted coolness at a bare 5600 feet was not perceptible. By contrast with Ziarat's 8000 feet, and with Qalat's 6700 too, Quetta felt as if it were as hot as Peshawar had been. It was not till we descended into the bowels of the Bolan Pass and then emerged on the plains at Dadhar that Quetta's climate came to seem temperate in delusive retrospect.

In the railway station restaurant at Sibi Junction, while we were waiting to entrain, we watched the ice melting in our tumblers and the butter melting in its dish. Sibi stands

434 feet above sea-level, in contrast to Quetta's 5600; and the temperature at Sibi on that 26th day of June was 129 in the shade. There is a story of a visitor to hell who found one of the inmates shivering under a blanket. When asked how he could feel cold in such a place, the poor fellow answered, with his teeth chattering: 'I come from Sibi.' (There is an equally plausible variant: 'I come from Multan.') The heat at Sibi was dry, and was therefore not intolerable. Anyway, for an historian, it was a cheap price to pay for having travelled by road through one of the World's historic thoroughfares. My companion, however, was an enthusiastic Karachi-ite by adoption, and he consoled himself for the temperature at Sibi by looking forward to the relief which, he promised me, was in store for us when we detrained at Karachi the next afternoon. A fresh sea-breeze, he declared, would keep the temperature at Karachi down well below 100. I did not doubt his word till, on stepping out of Karachi Cantonment station, I found myself in a temperature of 104, with humidity at saturation point. This was indeed unendurable; and, after two days of progressive liquefaction, I sought relief by fording the Hub River and doubling back into dry Baluchistan as far as the forty-second milestone from the steaming city.

In Karachi, should I be able to bear, even at 3.30 a.m., to put on my summer-weight English tweed suit in order to be catapulted in it to London? I did bear it, and I was thankful; for, some thirteen hours after leaving the ground at Karachi, I was landing at London Airport in a drizzle as chilly as the rain had been at Parachinar and in the juniper forest on the road to Ziarat. At London Airport, when I landed there on the 1st July, the temperature in the shade was just half what it had been at Sibi Junction six days earlier. My changes of climate had been fantastic, yet they had left me in the pink of health. After this experience, there was no climate that could any longer scare me—no, not even Karachi's.



## 42. Where Four Roads Meet

ONE may think that one has been prepared for Quetta. All the same, Quetta takes one by surprise—and this from whatever direction one has approached it. One may have known in advance that Quetta is a bustling prosperous modern city with 100,000 inhabitants. It is easy to look that up in a gazetteer. Yet nothing but a first-hand view of the surrounding country gives one a notion of the dramatic contrast between Quetta and this.

Little Waziristan surprises one by the density of the population that clings to its inhospitable rocks. Vast Baluchistan's emptiness is, by contrast, just what one would expect in this hardly less inhospitable land. Baluchistan's spring-fed oases are tiny, and one can count them on ten fingers. In Baluchistan one drives through miles and miles of solitude. But, when this trek through the wilderness brings one to Quetta, one is all the more taken aback. How account for Quetta? The place was still nothing better than a wretched huddle of mud-brick hovels when, in 1839, an invading British army—on its way to fighting and losing the First Anglo-Afghan War—staggered into Quetta out of the jaws of the Bolan Pass. You might say that Quetta's fortune was made by Sandeman when, in 1877, he established an advanced post of the British Indian Empire here after having successfully negotiated agreements with the Khan of Qalat the year before. Quetta has also been favoured by Nature. The springs at the head of the Urak valley supply the city with good drinking-water and leave plenty to spare for irrigation. There are also some coal-mines within easy reach. But neither mines nor springs nor Sandemen account for Quetta. The key to its importance is the same as the key to Begrám's. All roads lead to it; and, whenever the eastern edge of the Iranian plateau has been included in the dominions of a great empire, there must have been an important centre of communications at Quetta or in its immediate neighbourhood.

To-day, Quetta is the meeting-point of four roads—each duplicated, over part of its course, by a railway running alongside it. Forget the railways, and you have the road-map as it was in the sixth century B.C., in the days of the First Persian Empire.

The north-west road from Quetta leads to Qandahar in Afghanistan. (The accompanying railway stops short at Chaman, on the Pakistan side of the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier.) From Qandahar you can travel on to Herat, and from Herat into Persia to the present terminus of the Persian railway-network at Mashhad. You can also reach Mashhad, more circuitously, by the south-west road from Quetta, or by the accompanying railway, which crosses the Pakistan-Persia frontier and runs on as far as Zahidan (better known as Duzdab). From the railhead at Zahidan to the railhead at Mashhad you can make your way by bus. At the parting, south of Quetta, of the ways to Zahidan and to the Bolan Pass, the signboard on the Zahidan road proclaims 'London 5887 miles'. Presumably this figure is calculated along the roundabout route running south-west of Afghanistan and north-east of the Iranian desert. The length of the journey to London could be reduced very considerably by a driver who ventured to cross the southern end of the desert, heading straight from Zahidan to Kirman.

The south-east road from Quetta runs down through the Bolan Pass to the Indus at Sukkur, where today a barrage steals water from the great river to irrigate North-Eastern Sind. To match the signboard pointing along the Zahidan road to London, the signboard on the Bolan road ought to give the figures—whatever these may be—for the distances to Bombay, Poona, and Madras. The itinerary from Quetta to London via Zahidan is still 'music of the future'. But the itinerary from Quetta via the Bolan Pass to Maharashtra and the Deccan and the southern tip of India has already been written, time and again, into the World's history.

This route has been followed by wave after wave of immigrants into Southern India from the heartland of the Old World. Gurjaras, Pallavas, and Sakas each followed at their



forerunners' heels in this centuries-long procession. We can follow the procession back through a span of more than 2000 years in our historical records, and the evidence of philology adds another 2000 years to that. South of Quetta, on the western side of the Iranian plateau's eastern mountain rim, there is still a Dravidian-speaking population of Brahuis living intermingled with the Iranian-speaking Baluchis. And the survival of this remnant on the heartland side of the top end of the Bolan Pass suggests that, once upon a time, long before the first Indo-European-speaking invaders set foot on the soil of the Sub-continent, the ancestors of the present-day Dravidian-speaking peoples of Southern India must have descended upon the Sub-continent through the Bolan Pass, leaving behind, as witnesses to their passage, a party of stragglers who flinched from venturing into the jaws of hell.

My poor companion and our driver did, indeed, feel as if they were being called upon to descend into hell when I asked them to take me through the Bolan Pass by road. They pleaded that we should postpone the journey until after dark, which would, of course, have defeated the journey's whole purpose. The purpose was to see a thoroughfare that had played so great a part in history, and my appetite for seeing it, which had been increasing steadily with the passage of the years, had recently been whetted by some dramatic pictures on the walls of the Residency at Peshawar. In these tinted lithographs of episodes in the First Anglo-Afghan War, an interminable column of troops, guns, camels, horses, and mules was winding up a steeply ascending gorge with perpendicular sides. From the top of the cliffs, tribesmen were aiming at the invaders with their jezails; and sepoy and Europeans were scrambling up, rather ineffectively, to reply to the defenders' fire. I could not bear to miss seeing the original of this series of pictures when I was only a few miles away from the famous scene of action. Finally, I bargained with my two friends that they should guarantee to bring me out of the southern exit from the pass before nightfall, and that, subject to this proviso, we should

start no earlier in the day than would be necessary to make sure that the bargain would be kept.

When at last we started, I found that we were moving as slowly as the car would travel. The driver was lingering lovingly over every yard of the road that still ran at Quetta's 5600 feet. We were crawling over a dull plateau between the mountains. Was I going to be frustrated after all? Slowly though our driver was carrying us, he was unable to travel as slow as the Bolan Mail, which had left Quetta ten minutes before we had. We were hard on the crawling train's tail when, to my delight, I saw it slide slowly into a tunnel. The first piece of the pass could not now be very far ahead; and, sure enough, at Kolpur, the road and railway suddenly dipped, side by side, into hell's jaws.

Here it came, every bit as dramatic as those Early Victorian lithographs had depicted it. The perpendicular cliffs, the winding gorge, the precipitous descent: all the sensational features of the pictures were now being faithfully reproduced in real life. The scene went on unfolding itself, according to specification, all the way down from Kolpur to Mach. The railway (double-track) was as remarkable a tour de force of engineering as the line that runs up over the Khyber Pass from Jamrud and down again to Torkham on the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier. The Khyber Pass is a hump. From Landi Khana you have a magnificent view of the snow-crown of the Nuristan Mountains. The Khojak Pass, on the north-west road from Quetta to Chaman and Qandahar, is a gable. From the summit one could have seen half Afghanistan, if the view had not been blotted out by a dust-haze. In contrast to these two, the Bolan Pass is not convex but concave. It is a slot through which one slips down from 5600 feet above sea-level to 434.

The steepness of the descent was impressed upon me when, after we had left the Bolan Mail far behind (with an intention to board it at Sibi Junction at our leisure), our ears caught a faint panting sound far ahead, and our eyes saw two sets of three columns of black smoke rising skyward from far below. As the sight and the sound drew nearer, we saw that



they came from two goods-trains climbing the pass one behind the other. Neither train was a long one, but both were being pushed up-hill by two large locomotives at the rear, in addition to the third large locomotive that was hauling each train from the front. Three locomotives to a train: that was something that I had never seen before—not even on the Southern Railway of Peru, which climbs, at its highest point, to an altitude of 16,000 feet.

Between Kolpur and Mach the Bolan Pass closes its jaws on the traveller and masticates him. Beyond Mach, it plays cat and mouse with its victim. It opens its mouth and allows him a semblance of liberation, while all the time it is plotting to scrunch him again before finally releasing his mangled body. In the middle passage the cliffs recede, and the road inclines away rightward from the railway and from the Bolan River. The most arresting point on this middle stretch of the pass is the Bibi Nani bridge, where half-a-dozen right-bank affluents of the Bolan River join forces to thrust a trickle of clear water through a darband. Pause for a moment on this bridge and look westward. A vast concourse of shingle-beds fans out as far as the foot of the bleak mountains. What a wilderness! Its desolation is made all the more poignant by the thread of green that hems the ribbon of running water. There is no other sign of life in this huge barren expanse.

South of the bridge the road runs straight forward on the level. Then there comes a spring, with a grove of palm trees. The Bolan River reappears, sidling back towards the road from the left; and, once again, road and river dip down together into a winding slot which, for a mile or so, rivals the slot below Kolpur in its twistiness and its narrowness. At the narrowest point the road crosses to the left bank of the river over an iron bridge. But, by this stage, the pass's jaws are evidently weary. They cannot maintain their pressure, and reluctantly they relax. Gradually the valley widens and its containing-walls decrease in height, till, just at the point where one can see the river running out on to the plain, the road hoists itself over the valley's left shoulder and takes a right-angle turn towards the east. 'End of the Bolan Pass,'

declares a sign-board, and, at the same moment, daylight fades into twilight. The driver has kept faith with me. It is dusk by the time when we are passing Dadhar, the winter seat of the former Khans of Qalat. By the time when we reach Sibi Junction it is pitch-dark. But I do not need to see Sibi. It is enough to have seen the Bolan Pass—all the hell-hot sixty miles of it.

The fourth of the four roads that radiate from Quetta is the great east road to the Indus; and this road has two alternative routes. There is a high road which runs through the juniper forest round Ziarat and through the oasis of Loralai and reaches the Indus at Dera Ghazi Khan. This route runs on beyond the Indus and beyond the Chenab to Multan. And there is a low road, now accompanied by the railway from Quetta to Fort Sandeman, which runs along the open upper valley of the Zhob River. The low road is the easier of the two at the start, but it is the less direct. The longer it keeps to the easy open valley, the farther it is deflected towards the north; and, when, at Fort Sandeman, it finally resigns itself to turning sharply east and finding its way across the higher northern end of the Sulciman Range, it eventually reaches the Indus at the same point as the high road. A judicious traveller from Quetta to the Indus can strike a compromise between directness and ease. He can avoid the arduous climb over Ziarat by starting out along the low road into the Zhob valley and then crossing into the Loralai valley before the point at which the Zhob valley changes its direction from eastward to northward.

In approaching Quetta from Wana I crossed the low road at Fort Sandeman without travelling along any section of its course, and I struck the high road a few miles to the east of Loralai town. As our wheels left the gravel and touched the tarmac, my mind ran back to an evening, now sixteen weeks ago, when I had travelled over the farthest section of this route, starting from Multan. My host had taken me as far as the western end of the road-and-rail bridge over the Chenab. How I had longed, that evening, to travel on, through Muzaffargarh, to the east bank of the Indus, and to gaze across



heaven knows how many miles of water towards Dera Ghazi Khan. And how I longed, this morning, to turn eastward, heave myself over the tail of the Suleiman Range at Fort Munro, and gaze across those still unseen miles of Indus water towards Muzaffargarh. But, in every journey, there are as many objectives missed as there are objectives attained. The thrills have to be paid for by the twinges. For the present I must continue to depend on the map for my picture of the missing link in the road between Multan and Quetta; and even the best map is a most treacherous guide to the visual imagination.

This eastward road from Quetta is of particular interest for an historian, because it is the most convincing of several claimants to be the road by which the Persian Emperor Darius's Carian employee Scylax of Caryanda reached the Indus. Scylax's mission was to find out where the river ran into the ocean and then to discover a sea-route from the Indus delta to an Egyptian port on the Red Sea. The riverside city that was Scylax's point of departure on his brilliantly successful voyage of discovery is called Kaspapyros in the Ancient Greek geographer Hecataeus's version of the name, and this looks like a Greek equivalent of the Sanskrit Kasya-papura, which is the original name of Multan, according to Indian tradition. Down on the plains the rivers react against the dullness of the scene by capriciously changing their courses. So it is possible that, in Scylax's day, the foot of the hill that is the making of Multan was washed by either the Chenab or the Ravi or by the confluence of these two rivers. According to Hecataeus, Kaspapyros was a 'shore' (or alternatively a 'promontory') occupied by Central Asian nomads. According to Herodotus it lay in the Pactyan territory. Paktuikê: 'Pakhtu-Land': alias the Persian Empire's Arachosian satrapy. Did this province extend from Qandahar eastwards through Quetta and Loralai to the Indus at Dera Ghazi Khan, with a bridgehead, east of the Indus, at the vital point where the rivers of the Panjab converge, first with each other, and then with the Indus itself?

These problems of local administrative geography in the

sixth century B.C. were churning in my mind when I was recalled to the present with a start. Our car had drawn up, in Loralai town, at the door of the Political Agent's bungalow, and the Political Agent himself was greeting me. He turned out to be the former Additional Political Agent, Chitral, who had made his hazardous passage of the Lowarai Pass on the 13th May on his way out to take up his new appointment. He had been a sick man even before he had started, and the journey must have been an ordeal indeed. But already he was once again hale and hearty. To meet an officer of whose prowess I had heard so much was an unexpected pleasure. It swept the cobwebs out of my mind.

## 43. Baluchistan

HAVE you ever doubted Man's heroism? If you have, plunge southward from Quetta into Central Baluchistan, and your doubts will have been dispelled long before you have reached Khuzdar.

Khuzdar is nearly 200 miles south of Quetta, and not more than 240 miles north of Karachi. The road from Quetta to Karachi through Baluchistan west of the mountains would have been a much more interesting route than the railway-track, over the flat, from Sibi Junction through Sind. However, everyone whom I consulted who had a first-hand knowledge of the ground pronounced that the road south of Khuzdar was still impracticable. One day it was going to be metalled and tarmacked all the way from Karachi to Quetta, and then Khuzdar and Surab and Qalat would suddenly find themselves strung along one of the World's main thoroughfares. 'Meanwhile,' they warned me, 'beware.' And their consensus was so complete and so emphatic that, reluctantly, I renounced my more ambitious project and contented myself with an excursion from Quetta to Khuzdar and back.



I was partially reconciled to this poor-spirited renunciation when, travelling south, we passed two lorries, loaded with wool-sacks from Khuzdar, travelling *north*, though the wool was on its way to Karachi. Rather than run the gauntlet of those 240 miles of direct road southward, the Khuzdar wool-merchants were sending their consignments 160 miles northward by lorry to Mastung Road railway station, in order to send them southward from there by train. This roundabout route must have been at least three times as long as the direct route, so there must be good reasons for giving the direct route a wide berth. I did discover, for myself, the reason why, when, a few days later, I set out from Karachi along the road towards Khuzdar from the south, in order to see how far it would carry an ordinary town-bred four-wheeler. After fording the Hub River, we travelled over an excellent metalled and tarmacked surface as far as Sonmiani Beach. Then the tarmac changed to gravel, and, at the forty-second mile-stone from Karachi, we ran, un-awares, into a sand-drift and spent more than an hour in working our way back, inch by inch, on to the hard ground thirty yards behind us. Now I knew! But I still regret not having traversed the stretch between that sand-drift and Khuzdar. If I live to hear the news that those impassable 200 miles have at last been ballasted and surfaced, nothing will stop me, this time, from travelling from London to Karachi that way.

But I have been digressing from my subject, which is Baluchistan's testimony to Man's heroism. The evidence is conclusive and the spectacle is poignant.

When one travels southward from Quetta, the desolateness of the landscape here is so complete that, by comparison, the wilderness east of Quetta seems like a garden in retrospect. The distance from Quetta to Khuzdar is about 190 miles, and, in between, there are only four oases: Mastung, Qalat, Surab, Baghbana. 'Baluchistan, Qalat': this pair of names had been engraved on my mind ever since, at a tender age, I had been forced to learn by heart the names of the countries of the World and their capitals. The

Khanate of Qalat was, indeed, a veritable empire before the British shaved off strips of it adjoining Afghanistan and then bequeathed their suzerainty over the khanate to Pakistan, which has now 'integrated' all the previous autonomous Baluchistan states, Qalat included. Qalat State has had a famous history, but what does Qalat Town amount to? A fort and a couple of springs that provide drinking water for 4000 inhabitants, with a pittance left over for irrigating a few gardens and orchards. The springs of Baghbana are more copious; and, wherever there is flowing water in this part of the World, it is used, up to the limit, to give life to trees and men. But between Quetta and Khuzdar such favoured spots are rare. In all the rest of this vast region, Nature is niggardly. For mile after mile one travels over a bare plateau between two parallel lines of bare mountains, with no consoling patches of green at the mouths of the dry ravines that open out of them. The austerity of the landscape has a beauty that is all its own. The fantastically jagged sky-line delights the eye, but it provides no sustenance for the body. Yet Man does wring a livelihood out of this inhospitable land; he has, in fact, been making it support him since before the dawn of civilization. To a stranger's eye the landscape of Central Baluchistan looks irredeemably barren. Yet, for thousands of years, this country has been producing fine wheat and still finer wool.

How the flocks keep alive is a mystery. You see them obediently following the shepherd as he strides ahead of them across country. They have to traverse their pastures rapidly because the pasturage is so thin; and they must have to travel many miles more to find a drink. The flocks throng round every pool of rainwater. They are under constant attack by hunger and thirst; yet the quality of their wool is so high that it is much in demand at Karachi, and it makes profits for the merchants at Khuzdar who buy it up and send it off on its roundabout journey to the processing mill. It is also a mystery that Central Baluchistan should contrive to be a granary as well as a wool-farm. The rare irrigation-water is too precious to be wasted on so unprofitable a crop as



wheat; so nearly all the wheat-fields in Central Baluchistan depend for their water on catching a few drops of precarious rain. Wherever the terrain allows, an earth-built dam waits patiently for a casual shower. Perhaps, every other year or so, this 'band' will collect enough rainwater above it to warrant the peasant in sowing the plot in the hope of catching a crop. As I travelled through this thirsty land during the fourth week in June, I was amazed to see how many of these rain-fed fields were golden with ears ripe for harvest. The crop is thin; the harvesters gather it, stalk by stalk, into tiny bundles. Yet the aggregate amount of grain harvested must be great, and this starveling wheat is as fine in quality as the starveling wool. I have never eaten more tasty or more nourishing bread.

The present-day inhabitants of Baluchistan are heroes on a pathetically puny scale, but their prehistoric predecessors were giants. The dams that are going concerns today are modest earthworks, but the gabar bands ('heathen dams') of the prehistoric age are massive piles of well-built masonry. The present-day economy, heroic though it is, is dwarfed by the relics of this higher economy dating from a distant past. What is impressive is the amount of the labour that Man has been willing to expend in the hope of reaping so small a reward. Where there is some mighty river to be tapped for volumes of water that will irrigate millions of acres, it is not surprising that human beings should be willing to undertake laborious and costly irrigation works. But a gabar band on the chance of a catch-crop: that is heroism indeed.

## 44. Jetting Back to Thule

FOR more than four months I had been travelling in a central region of the Oikoumenê, where many of the great events of history had taken place. Now I was returning to my native fringe. The accident of birth had made me British, not

Japanese. So the jet-plane that I was boarding at Karachi was one travelling westward from Sydney to London. I was bound for Thule. My native island was, it is true, no longer Ultima, now that North America, not to speak of Iceland, had come into the field of civilization. All the same, Britain had been in the full stream of history for no longer than the last 200 years. She had splashed into it by making the Industrial Revolution. Afghanistan had been in the stream for 2500 years at least. So I was wading out of the deep sea of history back into the shallows on the Ocean's edge.

The previous time that I had travelled westwards by air from Karachi, we had flown over 'Iraq to Beirut. But that had been in 1957, before the latest revolution in Baghdad. In 1960 British and Australian aircraft (I was flying today by Qantas) were avoiding 'Iraq air. They were flying either north of 'Iraq over Persia and Turkey, or else south of 'Iraq over Sa'udi Arabia and Egypt. I was in luck. My plane was scheduled for the southerly route; and, if clouds permitted (always a big 'if' on a high flight), I might see some things that I had not seen so far: for instance, Mount Sinai, the Suez Canal, the Nile, the Pyramids.

It was still dark when I climbed on board the plane at 5.15 a.m., Karachi time. The passengers from Sydney already looked jaded. How would they be looking in London, thirteen hours from now? And how should I be feeling, even after a mere one day's flight at an average speed of 520 miles an hour?

Our first stage was the 1055 miles from Karachi to Bahrein over the horn of Arabia. This took us less than two hours. There was just time for the dawn to shed a purple glow over the Arabian Sea, and for daylight to break over the Persian Gulf. Clock-time jerked back one hour as we raced the rising Sun, and, what with this hour's extra grace and a haze between us and the Sun's shafts, we could stand out in the open at Bahrein without being roasted. It was hotter at Rome in the middle of the day.

Our next stage was the 1225 miles from Bahrein to Cairo airport, due westward across the whole breadth of Sa'udi



Arabia. At our standard rate of travelling, this stage would take us not much more than another two hours, and clock-time jerked back one hour for the second time. Having found myself in Bahrein almost before I had realized that I had left Karachi, I determined not to be caught out again; so, almost as soon as our plane had passed the east coast of the Arabian mainland, I kept my eye on the look-out for the derelict permanent way of the Hijaz Railway. The sight of it would give me a few seconds' warning that the Gulf of 'Aqabah was in the offing. I was still on the watch for the famous railway when suddenly a patch of blue came rushing towards us from the west. What a convincing mirage. But no, it was the Gulf of 'Aqabah itself. On our right I espied the beach, between Jordanian 'Aqabah and Israeli Elath, on which my wife and I had spent a quarter of an hour in 1957. At the line where the blue water ended, the yellow floor of a dry section of the Rift Valley ran northwards over the horizon on its way to dip down below the invisible blue surface of the Dead Sea. Running back to the left-hand window, I was just in time to see Mount Sinai. From our altitude it looked like a trivial corrugation on a piece of yellow paste-board. Then back to the right-hand window to see Suez and the Canal (strung, like a fine-drawn blue thread, from the head of the Gulf of Suez to the south-east end of the Bitter Lakes). In a moment the Gulf and the Canal had ebbed away astern and we were circling down on to Cairo airport. (Alas, this is far from being the same thing as Cairo city. I did not catch even a glimpse of that.)

Our next stage was to be the longest of the four: 1370 miles from Cairo to Rome, and clock-time jerked back two hours this time, and not just one. In most circumstances, gifts of time would be welcome, but these gifts of it on the wing were not. They were just so many tricks for postponing the hour in London when I should be seeing my wife again.

Now we were off the ground once more, and in an instant we were no longer over the yellow eastern desert. We were flying over dark green fields, sown thick with towns and villages. 'The delta of the River Nile is one of the most

intensively cultivated and densely populated regions in the World.' How often I had read those words or the equivalent. But the written word is miserably unevocative. 'The half was not told me.' One glimpse spoke more eloquently than any number of volumes. In a moment the yellow western desert was showing up beyond the green belt's opposite edge, and, on this desert's rim, streaming back astern, I just caught sight of three pointed protuberances in a row, each apparently about half an inch high. I had just time to register the Pyramids when I was plucked away to register the Damietta arm of the Nile. It wriggled like a snake as we flashed over it. And now we were speeding above the right bank of the Rosetta arm. A moment more, and the green fields of the Delta had turned into a lagoon, the lagoon into a sandspit, and the sandspit into the Mediterranean Sea.

Swivelling my neck round leftward, I saw the city of Alexandria faithfully reproducing the maps of it. There it lay on its yellow isthmus between sea and lake, just beyond the western corner of the green Delta. And there were the two harbours, divided by the peninsula that had once been the island of Pharos. Beyond Alexandria the yellow line of the Libyan coast appeared and disappeared, and, for the first time on this journey, there was nothing in sight but blue sea. Not for long, though. Here comes Crete. I am tiresomely imprisoned by my lunch-tray, but I manage to crane up and catch a glimpse of the higher peaks as we race past. More blue, and now we are charging, full-tilt, at the east coast of the 'toe' of Italy, and I am seeing sights that I had been disappointed of, twelve months ago, when I was travelling on wheels on the ground. To the right, Cape Colonne (hail, Hera Lacinia); to the left, Mount Etna. This was my first sight of Etna, though I had spent a week in Sicily last year—a week, but, all through that week, Etna was hidden under a cloud. To-day, Etna was soaring majestically into a clear sky. And it was the only monument, natural or man-made, that held up its head triumphantly against our altitude of 30,000 feet. Seen from this preposterous height, the Pyramids had looked like pimples, and Vesuvius looked like a wart when it



came and went a few minutes later. But Etna, like the Delta, managed to surpass all expectations.

Already we are over the Tyrrhenian Sea. Here come the Straits of Messina: I have seen them before; in fact, I have crossed them in the ferry. But Cape Milazzo, a salt-water Sirmione, and the Lipari Islands, a cluster of half-submerged volcanoes: this is my very first sight of these. Skipping over the Sorrento Peninsula and whizzing past Vesuvius and Naples and Lake Avernus, we fasten our seat-belts as we race up the track of the Via Latina, circle round Rome, and touch ground at Ciampino, facing back towards the Alban Hills.

And now for the last and shortest of today's four stages: the almost negligible 950 miles that separate Rome from London. (How close Rome lies to the fringe of the Oikoumenê; how far it lies from the centre.) Elba to the right, Corsica to the left; Porto Venere to the right; Genoa sliding away beneath us. Between Elba and Genoa we pass another jet-plane flying in the opposite direction. The rate at which we pass each other, being the sum of our speeds, must be something over 1000 miles an hour—and so, indeed, it looks: we win sight and lose sight of each other in a split second.

Here come the Alps: miniature replicas of the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas. They are free of cloud, but, seen from this ludicrous height (we are flying at 32,000 feet now), the Matterhorn is flattened out of recognition, and I could not tell you which of those snow-clad protuberances on our left was Mont Blanc. The Valais: well I can recognize that, and the Lake of Geneva, jostled by Montreux, Vevey, Lausanne, and Ouchy. Through the city of Geneva the Rhône runs out of the lake's lower end and wriggles away south-westward into France, while we are heading north-westward for Paris. Over Paris we go, and between there and the French coast we fasten our seat-belts and lower our altitude just in time to reach the earth again at London airport. By London time it is 3.00 p.m.; by Karachi time it must be 7.00 p.m. Thirteen and a half hours in the air. But how many days will it take me on the ground to recover from this prostrating experience?

## 45. The Roundabout in Retrospect

My four months and ten days at the centre of the Oikoumenê are over, and I have been catapulted back to my native Thule. What impressions have I brought back with me?

The dominant impression is easy to pick out. It is that in all the three countries that I have been visiting—Afghanistan, West Pakistan, and a tract of India between New Delhi and Udaipur—there is one common objective about which there is complete unanimity. On other issues, country may be at variance with country, and peoples with governments. But on this one issue there is no dispute. In each of these countries, government and people alike are intent, today, on giving the mass of the people some share in those benefits of civilization that, till now, have been the monopoly of a privileged minority.

Till now, this social injustice has perhaps been inevitable, in spite of its having always been odious. In the age before Man discovered how to increase his productivity enormously by applying science to technology, what he could produce was barely sufficient for keeping life in the body. The surplus was so small that a just distribution of it into fair shares for all would have meant reducing every share to vanishing point. In our time, for the first time in the history of civilization, the surplus is becoming large enough to provide everyone with a share that can have some appreciable value. In this new economic situation, social injustice is becoming avoidable and therefore intolerable; and this change in the moral situation has generated a movement to make the progress of technology minister to a social purpose—the purpose of narrowing the traditional gulf between a privileged minority and a destitute mass of human beings. By now this movement has become almost world-wide; so its prominence in the countries that I happen to have been visiting is not in



any way exceptional. At the same time, these three countries are interesting to any student of the advent of the welfare state because they are representatives of the class of 'under-developed' countries—a class which comprises at least two-thirds of the human race.

In an under-developed country, what does 'raising the standard of living' mean in practice? It means raising, first of all, the material standard to a level at which the raising of the spiritual standard can begin. In a region where the rainfall is too scanty to meet the needs of agriculture, the first material need is irrigation-works. The second is roads. The third is public health services; and these carry us over the borderline between what is material and what is spiritual. Even in a country where a majority of the people are poor and ignorant, preventive medicine can do wonders in reducing the death-rate—especially infant mortality. But this victory for Man over Nature calls for a victory by Man over himself.

The increase in material production through the application of technology will be offset—and perhaps more than offset—by the increase in population through the application of preventive medicine, unless the reduction in the death-rate is followed up by a corresponding reduction in the birth-rate. But the birth-rate, unlike the death-rate, cannot be reduced by public health measures carried out by a handful of officials with the people's passive acquiescence. It can be reduced only by individual decisions taken by husbands and wives; and this is the point at which preventive medicine merges into education. Reducing the birth-rate means making a revolutionary break with immemorially ancient habits. Up till now, most husbands and wives in the World have been in the habit of breeding up to the limit as an insurance against the risk of casualties through disease, famine, and war. They now have to convince themselves that, in the happier conditions which the progress of technology has made possible, the optimum size for a family is no longer the maximum size. Here we are already in the realm of education. If a peasant woman educates herself and her

husband into limiting the number of their children, and if the children that they do bring into the World all go to school—girls as well as boys—then the raising of the spiritual standard in that village will be well under way.

A people's spiritual standard cannot be raised unless the people themselves are eager, and able, to co-operate for this purpose with the government. But this means taking a responsible part in administration and politics, on however small a scale. And how can a people meet this demand on it if hitherto it had not had any political experience? To-day this is a burning question in many of those under-developed countries that are trying to shake off their traditional inertia and to raise their standard of living spiritually as well as materially.

Most of the countries that, in our time, have made a new political start have begun by adopting parliamentary democratic constitutions of the British or American type. In Russia, for instance, the first of the two revolutions in 1917 attempted to establish a regime of this kind. And in China the professedly democratic Kuomintang regime was on trial, not just for a few months, but for nearly twenty years (reckoning from the year 1929, when it extended its control over the greater part of the country). Parliamentary democratic constitutions have also been adopted, to begin with, in most of the other countries that have achieved political self-determination since then. In many of them, however, this first political experiment has had the same sequel as in China and in Russia. After a longer or shorter period of trial, the parliamentary democratic constitution that has been their first choice has been superseded by a new authoritarian regime of one or other of two kinds: either a Communist government or a military one.

It is not surprising either that parliamentary democracy should have been tried or that it should have proved a failure. It was tried because this regime was characteristic of those Western peoples that had been in the ascendant during the immediately preceding period of the World's history. Parliamentary democracy of the American or



British type was, in fact, commended both by snobbery and by superstition. Perhaps it was a talisman that would magically ensure success. At any rate, it was a badge of respectability and distinction. But it would have been wise, before adopting it, to take note of the practical conditions that would have to be fulfilled if parliamentary democracy was to be made to work effectively. In those few Western countries in which this political regime had been evolved, it had been worked out, by trial and error, over the course of several centuries, and, in so far as it had been successful, its success had been dependent on the presence, in the body politic, of a large contingent of able, experienced, honest, public-spirited citizens. It was therefore only to be expected that parliamentary democracy would fail to work in countries where this indispensable leaven was lacking. And it was virtually inevitable that most of these countries should have been forced, by this failure, to retreat into regimes of a kind that can be made to work with a smaller supply of honest and competent people than parliamentary democracy requires. Communist and military regimes can both be made to work with a small personnel of the kind. This explains why one or other of these two alternative regimes has been superseding parliamentary democracy in one underdeveloped country after another.

The present military regime in Pakistan has distinguished itself by two acts that are both to its credit. First, it has frankly faced the fact that a majority of the people of Pakistan are still too immature politically to be able to make a success of Anglo-American parliamentary democracy. Secondly, President Ayub has mounted a programme of practical self-education in public affairs which, if successful, will eventually result in the present military regime in Pakistan being replaced by democracy of an effective kind. This is the intention behind 'basic democracy'. The programme is experimental. There is no guarantee that the experiment will succeed. But there is also no evidence that the intention is not sincere.

In the term 'basic democracy' the word 'basic' is used in

the same sense as in the term 'basic English'. This is to be democracy stripped down to its barest essentials. It is to be the simplest kind of democracy that will still genuinely answer to the name. And the idea underlying the programme is that, the simpler that democracy is made, the greater the chance of its being a reality and not a sham. If a politically inexperienced people is to educate itself in managing its own affairs, it must begin by attempting this on a scale small enough to be within the range of the ordinary citizen's narrowly limited experience and understanding. If he can teach himself, by practice, how to take responsible decisions on the parish scale, he will be training himself for taking them eventually on the national scale. Meanwhile, let him be content with an indirect participation in the national government. Let him elect parish representatives who will elect district representatives who will elect national representatives. This device of indirect election is not, of course, a new invention. It is written, for instance, into the constitution of the United States; and, though there it has now been short-circuited and has become a dead letter, it was put there by the Founding Fathers—and this perhaps at least partly for the reason that was in President Ayub's mind when he gave his 'basic democracy' its pyramidal structure.

Pakistan's experiment in basic democracy is a piece of institutional pioneering; and its fortunes ought to be followed with close attention by the governments and peoples of other countries which are in more or less the same stage of political development. India is notable for her success, so far, since liberation, in making parliamentary democracy work—and this on a sub-continental scale. But in India too—and this quite independently of what has been happening in Pakistan—local self-government on the parochial scale is being actively fostered. This movement is much to the fore, just now, in Rajasthan, a state of the Indian Union which has recently experienced revolutionary changes, both social and economic. Before its integration into the present Indian body politic, Rajasthan was a mosaic of autocratically governed principalities in which the gulf between rich and



poor was inordinately wide. It is significant that, in the current reconstruction of the way of life in Rajasthan, administrative and political self-education on the parochial scale has been found to be an important part of the enterprise of raising the standard of living.

It will be seen that this enterprise has many ramifications. All of these have to be followed out if the enterprise as a whole is to succeed. And this multiple effort in many fields at once is bound to impose a severe strain on an under-developed country's economy.

Is it possible for an under-developed country to raise its standard of living, in this comprehensive sense, solely by its own unaided efforts? There are instances in history in which this has been achieved. Britain, for example, achieved it in her pioneer industrial revolution at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Soviet Union achieved it when she reconstructed her shattered economy after each of the two world-wars. In each of these three cases, however, the achievement cost super-human efforts and inhuman suffering. And it seems improbable that the under-developed countries of the present-day world will be able to do the like without foreign aid. At any rate, most of them are now receiving an appreciable amount of foreign aid from some quarter or quarters. And foreign aid entangles the present world-wide movement to raise the standard of living of the masses in the age-old international competition for power between states.

One of the characteristic features of the international power-game is the constant changing of alignments. The United States and the Soviet Union were allied with each other yesterday against Germany and Japan; tomorrow they may renew their alliance out of a common fear of China; to-day they are rivals in the competition for world-power. Since the invention of the atomic weapon, the international power-game has not been played again, so far, with its traditional instrument: war. But the play has not stopped; the two present players are contending with each other vigorously; and, since both of them have so far shrunk from

engaging in an atomic world-war, they have had to find a different instrument to play with. Their rivalry has, in fact, taken the form of a competition for gaining influence or control over other states. If either of them could draw into its own camp all the other states in the World except its rival, it would, no doubt, then have check-mated its rival. It is perhaps improbable that the present Russo-American rivalry for influence will ever reach so conclusive a result as this. Meanwhile, this competition for influence is the form that Russo-American rivalry is taking. And one of the most promising means of acquiring political influence is to give economic aid.

Pakistan is accepting aid at present from the United States and her allies exclusively. India and Afghanistan are accepting it from both camps. If one is considering the interests of the human race as a whole, one cannot regret that, in the Atomic Age, the hazardous rivalry between great powers should incidentally bring about a certain transfer of wealth from richer hands to poorer. But this benefit is being bought too dear at the price of the risk of extermination that now hangs over the heads of the whole human race, and particularly over the heads of those under-developed peoples who are accepting foreign aid at the cost of allowing themselves to be compromised politically. Peshawar now has a red ring drawn round it on Mr Krushchev's bombing-map, and Afghanistan may discover that a bear's hug can maul his victim as badly as a jab from his claws.

Some of Russia's and America's competitive gifts to Afghanistan, in the shape of roads, have been mentioned in the first chapter of this book. But roads are not the only public works that Afghanistan has been receiving from the two powers that are competing in the game of doing practical services for her. The American irrigation-works on the Arghandab and Helmand rivers are being countered by Russian irrigation-works on the Kabul and Kunar rivers—and so on and so on. *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*. In accepting so much foreign aid, the Afghan Government is taking big risks, but, no doubt, it is taking these consciously and de-



liberately. The Afghan statesmen who have the last word are able men who have a knowledge of the World, and they also have the benefit of the experience of their predecessors. For at least 130 years past, successive generations of Afghan statesmen have had to practise the dangerous art of dodging rival powers who have been threatening to crush Afghanistan between them. The present competition in Afghanistan between the Soviet Union and the United States is a continuation of the nineteenth-century competition there between the Russian Empire and Britain. The Afghan Government is acting with its eyes open. Its political temerity gives the measure of its economic need. The need is so great that the Government jumps at any offer to meet it, however great may be the political risk.

While it is not difficult to understand why the Afghan Government is accepting foreign aid, it is not so easy to see why it is allowing the Russians to have the lion's share of the business. Unpleasant past experiences have made the Afghans suspicious of foreign powers and cautious in their relations with them. Considering this habit of mind, it might have been expected *a priori* that the Afghan Government would have arranged to take, say, 90 per cent of its foreign aid from the United States, assigning a token 10 per cent to the Soviet Union for tactfulness' sake. Though neither of Afghanistan's benefactors is a disinterested philanthropist, the United States is obviously by far the less dangerous of the two. North America is sundered from Afghanistan by the breadth of the Ocean and the length of Western Pakistan. The Soviet Union is Afghanistan's next-door neighbour. The United States is not suspect of having any territorial ambitions in Asia, whereas the history of Russia in Asia has been a history of territorial expansion. These points—which must loom large in suspicious Afghan minds—ought to have been winning cards in America's hand in the game that she is playing against Russia in Afghanistan. Why is it, then, that America is losing the game in Afghanistan to Russia, as apparently she is—at any rate in the present match? The only convincing explanation is that the

Russians must somehow have contrived to make their aid more attractive than American aid—so much more attractive that this attractiveness has outweighed the risk.

In competing with the Russians the Americans labour under two handicaps, their business sense and their standard of living. Their business sense probably makes it more difficult for them than it is for the Russians to realize that foreign aid is not a commercial transaction but a political one, and that, the freer it is from economic strings, the more likely it will be to bear political fruit. The American standard of living is the heavier handicap of the two. It insulates Americans on missions abroad from the foreign peoples whose good will they are seeking to win. In Afghanistan an American—or, for that matter, a West European—can be identified from miles away. The food he eats, the clothes he wears, the house he lives in: these all conspire to make him conspicuous. By contrast, the Russian technicians in Afghanistan are invisible. In a twenty-three days' journey round the country, I saw no more than two people who looked as if they might be Russians. It is not surprising that I did not see Russian military instructors. I was not trying to pry into military installations. But it is strange that I did not see Russians employed on civilian public works. Possibly I did set eyes on a number of them, but had no clue for distinguishing them from the Afghans among whom they were working. If this is in truth the explanation of the invisibility of the Russians in Afghanistan, it means that they have an advantage over their American competitors that is important and that might even be decisive.

Being involved in the Russo-American power-game as the price of receiving foreign aid would have been dangerous for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India in any circumstances. The unfriendly political relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan and between Pakistan and India are making this danger greater than it would otherwise have been.

Like most non-Western countries in the World today, these three have been infected with the Western political disease of nationalism; and, like most other non-Western countries,



they cannot afford this additional tax on their social health and strength. Nationalism attacks a non-Western country through its Westernised intelligentsia; but, where the intelligentsia is in power, the sickness eventually spreads from the summit to the lower strata of the political and social hierarchy. A Turkish proverb puts the point picturesquely. 'A fish rots from the head downwards.'

In Afghanistan, where the process of modernisation has not yet gone deep, there is little sign of nationalism among the mass of the people. The official doctrine in Afghanistan is that the districts on the Pakistan side of the Durand Line that are inhabited by Pathans are a Pakhtun *terra irredenta*—'Pakhtunistan'—and that Pakistan is sinning against the Pakhtun people in refusing to give up its rule over this territory. So far, however, this doctrine has not made the mass of the people in Afghanistan feel any hostility towards Pakistanis. I was able to verify this on my journey round Afghanistan. In our party of seven, only two of us were English; four were Pakistanis (all of them Pathans). It was obvious that, in the eyes of the Afghans with whom they consorted, our Pakistani companions were neither victims of oppression nor oppressors. They were just fellow Muslims and, in the southern part of Afghanistan, fellow speakers of the Pashtu-Pakhtu language. On both sides, relations were quite unselfconscious and entirely friendly.

In Pakistan the leaven of nationalism has already worked its way deeper down. It has even reached the Pathan and Baluchi tribal districts along the frontier. In my journey down the Pakistan side of the frontier, I was given a number of opportunities of meeting tribal maliks. More than once, when I had asked a question about sheep or fruit, I was answered with a tirade about Kashmir. I understand the strength of the feeling about Kashmir in Pakistan. All the same, the quarrel over Kashmir is a Western luxury that neither Pakistan nor India can afford.

In embracing nationalism as an adjunct of modernisation, the non-Western peoples have made one of Europe's worst evils their own. Since partition, the Sub-continent has

become a second Europe in the worst sense. Kashmir is the sub-continental Vilna, 'Pakhtunistan' the sub-continental Sudetenland. The Durand Line has become as sacred to Pakistanis, and the McMahon Line to Indians, as Gibraltar is to Englishmen or West Berlin to West Germans. It is queer that lines drawn by British officials should have been consecrated retrospectively as precious national assets of the British Indian Empire's non-British successor-states. At the time when those lines were drawn, the transaction produced no stir among the Hindu and Indian Muslim subjects, as they then were, of the British Crown. If any of them paid any attention at all to what Durand and McMahon were doing, they will have written it off as just another move in the immoral game of power-politics that the British imperialists were playing at the Indian tax-payer's expense. The present consecration of these British-made lines as heirlooms in the successor-states' national heritages is an unexpected and unfortunate turn of history's wheel.

An Englishman who visits India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan today and crosses and re-crosses the frontiers between these countries is led into a melancholy train of thought by the spectacle of the opposing armaments echeloned behind each of these frontiers on either side. He remembers that, when the Sub-continent was still politically united, the British Indian Government had only one frontier to hold: the north-west frontier facing Afghanistan and, behind Afghanistan, Russia. In those days the Indo-Chinese frontier had not yet lit up. For purposes of military defence it could be ignored. Yet the cost of holding that single frontier on the north-west imposed a severe strain on the united Sub-continent's finances. Today the north-west frontier is being held by Pakistan alone, and she has a second front in the Panjab and Bengal against India. Conversely, India has a front in Bengal and the Panjab against Pakistan, and now she has a second front against China along the whole length of the Himalayas. As for Afghanistan, her entente with the Soviet Union may prove as perilous, in the long run, as an anti-Russian front would have been. Obviously all three countries



have been led by nationalism to subject themselves to a strain that they have not the strength to bear.

One need not be an Englishman to take this point. It has been taken by President Ayub of Pakistan. He has pointed out that all three countries alike run a risk of losing their independence if they do not succeed in composing their present quarrels and standing together for their common defence. Nature has been kind to the Sub-continent in fencing it in with a rampart of mountains, but today two giants from the north are peering between the peaks to see how the land lies to the south. What they are seeing is just what suits their book. They see a Sub-continent partitioned between mutually hostile states, and they see these states putting all their strength into arming against each other. This spectacle might tempt even an Ashoka or a Gandhi into committing aggression. And the present rulers of China and Russia are not Gandhis or Ashokas.

President Ayub has shown courage in pointing out these facts, and greater courage in acting on them. He has held out a hand of friendship to India and has proposed that the two countries should open the way to cooperating for their common defence by trying to arrive at an agreed settlement of their dispute over Kashmir. President Ayub's move had not met with much response from the Indian side by July 1960 (the time when this chapter was being written). A positive response would, of course, call for 'an agonising re-appraisal' of the foreign policy that India has been pursuing since independence and partition. Is a reconciliation between India and Pakistan a practical possibility within the foreseeable future? Perhaps Russia and China, between them, may, contrary to their own intentions, do a service to Pakistan and India that these two countries would find it difficult to do for themselves without the help of external pressure. Perhaps the two giants from beyond the mountains will force the two present tenants of the Sub-continent into each other's arms.

When I arrived in New Delhi on the 20th February, 1960, I found the Chinese screw turning hard, not only on

the Indian Government, but on the Indian people too. India had been awakened with a shock from a dream on which she had based her foreign policy. She had taken it as certain that she and China could never come into conflict with each other, and that their relations would be governed in perpetuity by the Five Principles to which both governments had subscribed. And then suddenly China had shown India a different face. The Indian government and people now found themselves up against a power that was more than India's match and that was blithely disregarding India's interests and susceptibilities. The only thing that they knew about China now was that her actions were unpredictable.

The screw that was turning on India in February 1960 had taken further turns by the time when I came back to New Delhi in April. It is turning still, and seems likely to continue to turn for as far as one can see ahead. Sooner or later, this portentous pressure will surely produce a resolution of forces. So, if President Ayub is as patient as he is far-sighted, he may perhaps achieve a *détente* between Pakistan and her two neighbours. This would be as great a boon for India and Afghanistan as for Pakistan herself. But the outcome is obviously in doubt. Statesmanship might be defeated by nationalism, and nationalism might cost its devotees their national independence. If the Sub-continent did bring this fate upon itself, this would not be the first instance of the triumph of folly in history.



## Itinerary, A.J.T., 1960

- |          |       |  |                        |
|----------|-------|--|------------------------|
| February | 19    | 9.30 a.m. took off from London airport   | } (by jet<br>aircraft) |
|          | 20    | 5.00 a.m. landed at New Delhi  |                        |
|          | 20-23 | At New Delhi   |                        |
|          | 21    | New Delhi - Tughlaqabad - Adilabad - New Delhi (by road)   |                        |
|          | 24    | New Delhi-Karachi (by air)   |                        |
|          | 25    | Visited excavations of early Muslim Indus-port at Bhampore   |                        |
|          | 25    | 9.00 p.m. left Karachi   | } (by train)           |
|          | 26    | 1.13 p.m. arrived Multan   |                        |
|          | 26-28 | At Multan  |                        |
|          | 28    | Evening: Multan-Chenab Bridge-Multan (by road)   |                        |
|          | 29    | Multan-Harappa-Baloki Barrage-Lahore (by road)   |                        |
| March    | 1     | 7.30 a.m. left Lahore, 5.50 p.m. arrived Peshawar (by road)  |                        |
|          | 1-30  | On the campus of the University of Peshawar  |                        |
|          | 2     | Peshawar-Warsak Dam-Jamrud-Peshawar (by road)  |                        |
|          | 4     | Peshawar - Charsadda - Mardan - Malakand - Thana-Malakand-Nowshera-Peshawar (by road)  |                        |
|          | 6     | Peshawar through Khyber Pass to Torkham and back (by road)   |                        |
|          | 11    | Peshawar-Attock-Abbottabad-Kakul Military Academy - Abbottabad - Haripur - Turbela - bridge of boats over the Indus-Jahangiri-bridge of boats over the Kabul River-Nowshera-Peshawar (by road) |                        |
|          | 13    | Peshawar - Kohat - Khushhalgarh - Kohat - Peshawar (by road)   |                        |
|          | 16    | Peshawar-Rawal Pindi (by road)   |                        |
|          | 17    | morning: Rawal Pindi-Peshawar (by road)  |                        |
|          | 17    | afternoon: Peshawar - Mardan - Shahbazgarh (Ashoka's two inscriptions)-Mardan-Peshawar (by road)   |                        |

- March 18 Peshawar-Kohat (Officers' Training School)-  
Peshawar (by road)
- 20 Peshawar-Shabkadar Fort-Abazai-Charsadda-  
Peshawar (by road)
- 23 Peshawar-Charsadda-Takht-i-Bhai-Mardan-  
Nowshera-Peshawar (by road)
- 25 Peshawar - Kund Rest-House - Khairabad -  
Attock Rest-House-Peshawar (by road)
- 27 Peshawar-Nowshera-Mardan-Swabi-Ambar-  
Hund and back (by road)
- 30 Peshawar-Lahore (by air)
- 30-31 at Lahore
- April 1 Lahore-New Delhi (by air)
- 1-17 at New Delhi, with expeditions into Rajasthan
- 2 New Delhi-Siri (Begampuri Mosque, Khirki  
Mosque, Satpula Dam, Chiragh Walled City)  
-New Delhi (by road)
- 3 New Delhi-Jaipur (by air); Jaipur-Ajmer (by  
road)
- 4 morning: Ajmer-Taragarh-Ajmer (on wheels  
and feet)
- 4 afternoon: Ajmer-Madaliya Fort-Ajmer (on  
wheels and feet)
- 5 Ajmer-Kishangarh palace and lake-Jaipur (by  
road)
- 6 Jaipur-Amber-Jaipur (by road)
- 7 Jaipur-Sanganer-Galta-Bhakrota-Jaipur (by  
road)
- 8 Jaipur-Jodhpur (by air); Jodhpur-Mandor-  
Jodhpur (by road)
- 9 Jodhpur-Nagaur-Osian-Jodhpur (by road)
- 10 Jodhpur-Jaisalmer-Ludra-Jaisalmer (by road)
- 11 Jaisalmer-Jodhpur-Ajmer (by road); left Ajmer  
(by night mail)
- 12 arrived New Delhi (by train)
- 12-15 at New Delhi
- 16 New Delhi-Udaipur airport (by air); Udaipur  
airport-Chittor-Udaipur city (by road)
- 17 Udaipur-New Delhi (by air)
- 18 left New Delhi (by train)
- 19 arrived Lahore (by train)
- 19 left Lahore (by train)



- April 20 arrived Peshawar 6.15 a.m. (by train); 9.00 a.m. left Peshawar in U.K. lorry; 10.20 p.m. arrived Kabul (by road)
- 20-24 at Kabul
- 22 Kabul-Istâlif-Charikar-Kabul (by road)
- 25 Kabul-Sheikhabad-Ghazni (by road)
- 26 Ghazni-Mukur (by road)
- 27 Mukur-Qalat-i-Ghilzai-Qandahar (by road)
- 27-28 at Qandahar
- 28 morning: Qandahar-Chihil Zina-Ahmad Shah Abdâli's tomb-Qandahar (by road)
- 28 afternoon: Qandahar - Baba Wali - Qandahar (by road)
- 29 morning: Qandahar-Mir Wais's tomb-Arghandab bridge - Khushk-i-Nakhud - Maiwand battlefield - Khushk-i-Nakhud - Lashkargah (by road)
- 29 afternoon: Lashkargah (modern) - Lashkari Bazar (Ghaznavid) - Qala-i-Bisht - Lashkargah-bridge over Helmand River-Nad-i-'Ali-Gah-i-Anjir-bridge-Lashkargah (by road)
- 30 morning: Lashkargah - bridge - Shamalan - Darwishan - diversion dam - Darwishan - Marja-bridge-Lashkargah (by road)
- 30 afternoon: Lashkargah - Lashkari Bazar - Lashkargah (by road)
- May 1 Lashkargah-Girishk-head of Bughra Canal on Helmand River-Girishk-Dilaram-Farah (by road)
- 2 Farah - Shahr-i-Faridûn - Farah-Shin Dand (Sabzawar)-Herat (by road)
- 2-4 at Herat
- 5 Herat - Sabzak Pass - Laman - Qala-i-Nau (by road)
- 6 Qala-i-Nau - Moghar ford - Darra-i-Boom gorge - Murghab valley - Bala Murghab - Ghormash Bazar - ford at confluence of Shishaktu and Doabi rivers-Qaisar-Alma River ford-Maimana (by road)
- 6-7 at Maimana
- 8 Maimana - Daulatabad - Dasht-i-Leili - Shibarghan (by road)

- May      9      Shībarghan – Aqcha – Pul-i-Imam Bukri –  
Mazar-i-Sharīf (by road)
- 9-10 at Mazar
- 10      Mazar–Pul-i-Imam Bukri–Balkh–Mazar (back  
by direct road)
- 11      Mazar – Bagh-i-Jahan-nima – Tashkurgan  
(Khulm) – Shībaghlu Kotal Pass – Ergenek  
Pass–Kundūz River ferry–Kundūz (by road)
- 11-12 at Kundūz
- 12      Kundūz–Qyzyl Qala port on the Oxus River–  
Kundūz (by road)
- 13      morning: Kundūz – Baghlan – Pul-i-Khumri  
(by road)
- 13      afternoon: Pul-i-Khumri – Surkh Kotal – Pul-i-  
Khumri (by road)
- 13-14 at Pul-i-Khumri
- 14      Pul-i-Khumri–Surkh Kotal–Pul-i-Khumri (by  
road)
- 15      Pul-i-Khumri–Doshi–Bamian (by road)
- 15-16 at Bamian
- 17      Bamian–Shibar Pass–Charikar–Kabul (by road)
- 17-27 at Kabul
- 23      Kabul–Minar-i-Chakri–Kabul (on wheels and  
feet)
- 26      Kabul–Begrām–Shotorak–Kabul (by road)
- 28      Kabul–Tang-i-Garú–Darunta–Jallalabad (by  
road)
- 29      Jallalabad – Hadda – Torkham – Peshawar  
(by road)
- 29-31 at Peshawar
- June      1      Peshawar–Rawal Pindi (by road); Pindi–Gilgit  
by air)
- 1-2      at Gilgit
- 2      Gilgit up Hunza Valley to within sight of Mount  
Rakapochi and back (by jeep)
- 3      Gilgit–Pindi (by air); Pindi–Wah–Taxila–Wah  
Bagh–Peshawar (by road)
- 3-5      at Peshawar
- 6      Peshawar–Amandarra (by road)
- 7      morning: Amandarra – Chakdarra – Dir (by  
road); afternoon: Dir Upper Guest-House–  
Mena River–Dir Upper Guest-House (on  
wheels and feet)



- June 8 Dir-Chakdarra-Thana-Saidu Sharif (by road)  
 9 morning: Saidu-Bahrein-Saidu (by road)  
 9 afternoon: Saidu-Udegram-Saidu (on wheels and feet)  
 10 Saidu-Barikot Gundeï-Karâkar Pass-Buner-Pir Baba shrine-Kandao Pass-Dugga Darband-Ambela Pass-Shahbazgarh-Mardan-Peshawar (by road)  
 10-11 at Peshawar  
 12 Peshawar - Kohat - Thal - Chapri - Alizai - Sadda-Parachinar (by road)  
 12-13 at Parachinar  
 13 Parachinar - Shalazan - Peiwar - Teri Mangal Fort-Burki timber market-Kharlachi Fort-Shin Khak-Parachinar (by road)  
 14 Parachinar-Thal-bridge over Kurram River-Shewa-Spinwam-Kaitu River ford-Mir 'Ali Fort-Miranshah Fort (by road)  
 14-15 at Miranshah Fort  
 15 Miranshah Fort-bridge over Tochi River-Damdel - Dosalli - Gardai - Razmak Cantonment-Miranshah Fort (by road)  
 16 Miranshah Fort-Mir 'Ali Fort-Bannu-Darreh Tangi - Kalabagh - Iskandarabad (by road)  
 17 Iskandarabad - Indus Gorge - Darreh Tangi - Tank-Wana Fort (by road)  
 17-18 at Wana  
 19 Wana Fort-Gulkach-Sri Toi-Fort Sandeman-Apozai-Fort Sandeman (by road)  
 20 Fort Sandeman-Loralai-Ziarat (by road)  
 21 morning: Ziarat-Quetta (by road)  
 21-25 at Quetta  
 21 afternoon: Quetta-Urak Valley-Quetta (by road)  
 22 Quetta-Mastung-Qalat-Surab-Anjira ruins-Baghbana-Khuzdar (by road)  
 23 Khuzdar-Miri Bhur-Khuzdar (by road)  
 23 Khuzdar-Firuzabad (off the road to Nal)-Khuzdar (by road)  
 23 Khuzdar-Qalat (by road)  
 24 Qalat-tops of the Miri-Qalat (on feet); Qalat-Quetta (by road)

June	25	Quetta-Khojak Pass-Chaman-Pishin-Quetta (by road)	
	26	Quetta-Bolan Pass-Sibi (by road); 9.30 p.m. left Sibi (by train)	
	27	2.10 p.m. arrived Karachi (by train)	
	27-30	at Karachi	
	29	Karachi-Hub River-42nd milestone on road to Las Bela-Hub River-Karachi	
July	1	5.25 a.m. left Karachi	} (by jet aircraft)
		2.30 p.m. arrived London	



## A Key to the Map

Each Arabic numeral on the map stands for the place and the date or dates that are attached to the same numeral in the following table.

1 New Delhi	February 20-23; April 1-17, 1960
2 Karachi	February 24; June 27-30
3 Bhamapore	February 25
4 Multan	February 26-28
5 Chenab Bridge	February 28
6 Harappa	February 29
7 Montgomery	February 29
8 Baloki Barrage	February 29
9 Lahore	February 29; March 30-31; April 19
10 Jhelum	March 1
11 Rawal Pindi	March 1, 16; June 1, 3
12 Attock Bridge	March 1, 11, 16, 17, 25; April 20; June 1, 3
13 Nowshera	March 1, 4, 11, 16, 17, 23, 25, 27; April 20; June 1, 3
14 Peshawar	March 1-30; April 20; May 29-31; June 3-5; 10-11
15 Warsak Dam	March 2
16 Jamrud	March 2, 6; April 20; May 29
17 Charsadda	March 4, 20, 23
18 Mardan	March 4, 17, 23, 27; June 10
19 Malakand	March 4; June 6
20 Thana	March 4; June 6, 8
21 Khyber Pass	March 6; April 20; May 29
22 Abbottabad	March 11
23 Kakul	March 11
24 Kohat	March 13, 18; June 12
25 Khushhalgarh	March 13
26 Abazai	March 20
27 Takht-i-Bhai	March 23
28 Hund	March 27
29 Jaipur	April 3, 5-7
30 Ajmer	April 3-4, 11
31 Kishangarh	April 5
32 Jodhpur	April 8-9, 11

33	Mandor	April 8
34	Nagaur	April 9
35	Osian	April 9
36	Jaisalmer	April 10
37	Ludra	April 10
38	Chittor	April 16
39	Udaipur	April 16
40	Jallalabad	April 20; May 28
41	Kabul	April 20-24; May 17-27
42	Istâlif	April 22
43	Charikar	April 22; May 17
44	Sheikhabad	April 25
45	Ghazni	April 25
46	Mukur	April 26
47	Qalat-i-Ghilzai	April 27
48	Qandahar	April 27-28
49	Baba Wali	April 28
50	Maiwand	April 29
51	Lashkargah	April 29-30
52	Qala-i-Bisht	April 29
53	Nad-i-'Ali	April 29
54	Gah-i-Anjir	April 29
55	Darwishan	April 30
56	Darwishan Diversion Dam	April 30
57	Marja	April 30
58	Girishk	May 1
59	head of Bughra Canal	May 1
60	Dilaram	May 1
61	Farah	May 1
62	Shin Dand (Sabzawar)	May 2
63	Herat	May 2-4
64	Qala-i-Nau	May 5
65	Bala Murghab	May 6
66	ford across confluence of Doabi and Shishaktu rivers	May 6
67	Qaisar	May 6
68	Maimana	May 6-7
69	Daulatabad	May 8
70	Shibarghan	May 8
71	Aqcha	May 9
72	Mazar-i-Sharif	May 9-10
73	Balkh	May 10
74	Tashkurgan (Khulm)	May 11



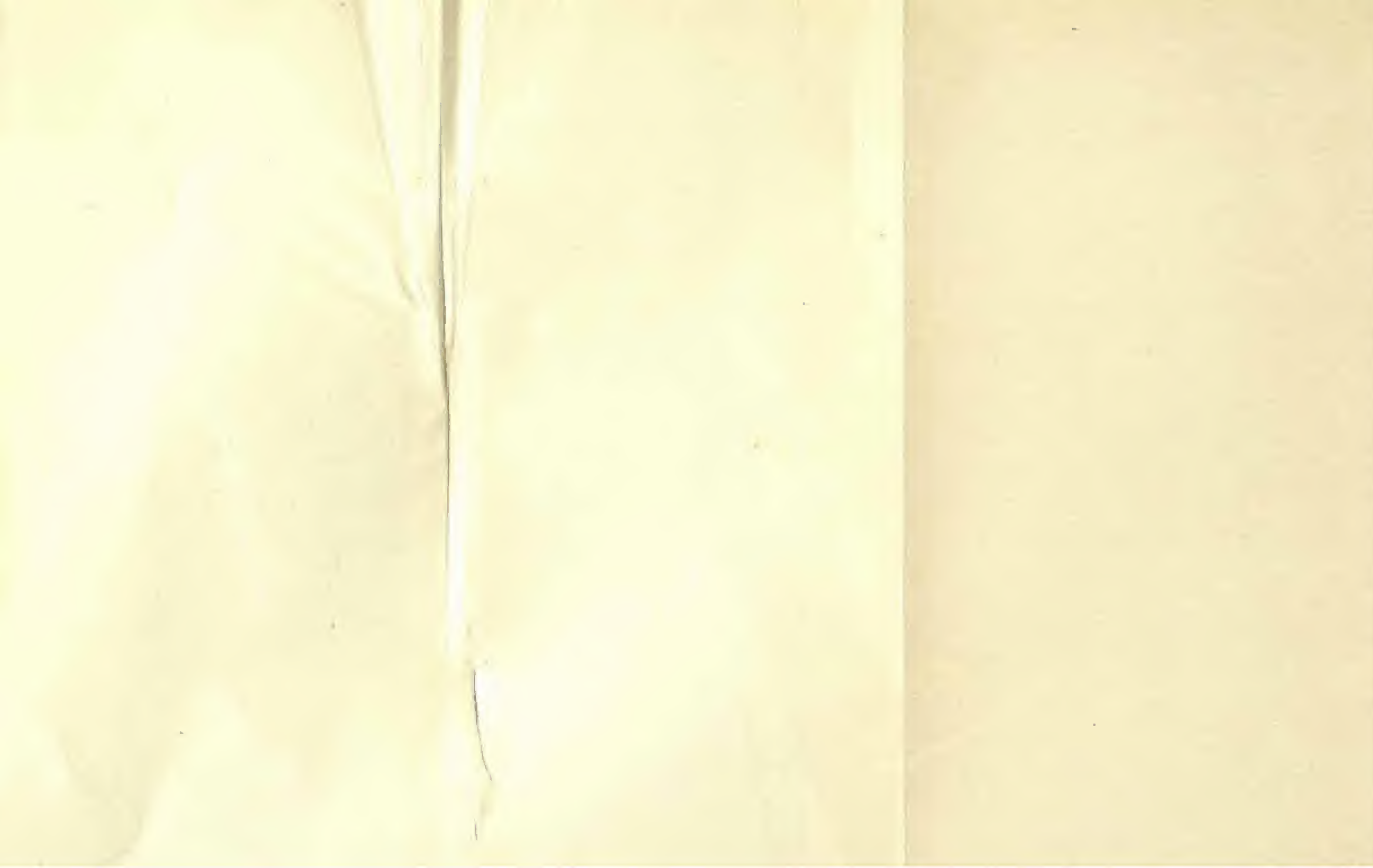
75	Kundûz	May 11-12
76	Qyzyl Qala	May 12
77	Baghlan	May 13
78	Pul-i-Khumri	May 13-14
79	Surkh Kotal	May 13, 14
80	Doshi	May 15
81	Bamian	May 15-16
82	Minar-i-Chakri	May 23
83	Begrâm	May 26
84	Shotorak	May 26
85	Gilgit	June 1-2
86	Chalt	June 2
87	Taxila	June 3
88	Amandarra	June 6
89	Dir	June 7
90	Mena River	June 7
91	Saidu Sharif	June 8-9
92	Ambela Pass	June 10
93	Thal	June 12, 14
94	Parachinar	June 12-13
95	Mir 'Ali Fort	June 14, 16
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